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LORD MELBOURNE



*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

CARDINAL NEWMAN

EDMUND BURKE





VISCOUNT MELBOURNE

*(From a painting by John Partridge in the National Portrait Gallery)*

LORD MELBOURNE

by

Bertram Newman

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1930

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TO  
J. C. N.



## PREFACE

“By the way,” once wrote York Powell, “I like Melbourne much; the more I read of him and by him the more he delights me; very human, very sane, very wise and no cant at all.” Melbourne has been sketched for this generation in Chapter III of Mr. Lytton Strachey’s *Queen Victoria*; the present volume is an attempt to supply the further information about him which readers of that work will assuredly desire. I hope that it may be regarded rather from the biographical than the historical standpoint, difficult though it must be to keep the two sides apart with a man who was Prime Minister for nearly seven years of an important period of English history. Melbourne has, I venture to think, been underrated as a statesman; none the less, it is certainly as a man rather than as a statesman that he is of special interest.

The sources upon which I have drawn are given at the end; they are mainly printed sources with a little MS. Of special importance is the volume, *Lord Melbourne’s Papers*, published in 1889 by Messrs. Longmans, Green & Co., to whom my grateful acknowledgments are due for the permission accorded me to quote from it. The late Mr. Lloyd Sanders edited these papers



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admirably, and also wrote the article on Melbourne in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Unfortunately he never undertook a longer biography, but contented himself with providing the indispensable basis of any such work.

It is a good many years now since the publication of the last book on Melbourne ; in the meanwhile, there have appeared such well-known works as the early *Letters of Queen Victoria* and *The Girlhood of Queen Victoria* (John Murray) ; Lady Airlie's *In Whig Society* (Hodder and Stoughton) and the *Leveson-Gower Correspondence* (John Murray), to all of which a biographer of Melbourne must owe considerable obligations.

I have tried to supply the necessary historical background, without making any attempt to "add to knowledge of the period." Recent works to which I am particularly indebted are indicated in the Bibliography ; I may mention here Dr. Arthur Aspinall's *Lord Brougham and the Whig Party* (Manchester University Press), Miss Jessie K. Buckley's *Joseph Parkes of Birmingham* (Methuen), Mr. G. Kitson Clarke's *Peel and the Conservative Party, 1832-1841* (Bell), and, above all, M. Halévy's *History of the English People, 1830-1841* (English Translation, Fisher Unwin).

Lord Hatherton has most kindly allowed me access to the unpublished diary and correspondence of his grandfather, who was Chief Secretary of Ireland under Grey, a well-informed observer of

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contemporary events, and a friend and admirer of Melbourne's. My best thanks are also due to several friends who have helped me with kindly criticism, to Professor W. Garmon Jones of the University of Liverpool, to Mr. Kenneth Forbes and to Mr. R. H. Charles.

B. N.

*Liverpool,*  
*October, 1929.*



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# LORD MELBOURNE

## CHAPTER I

### *LADY MELBOURNE AND HER SON*

Lord Melbourne, one day in 1838, was talking of his father's family to Queen Victoria. "All I know is," he said, "that in 1670 there was born at Southwell a fellow called Peniston Lamb, in very humble circumstances; he went up to London, studied the law, and became a Conveyancer and an Agent, and made a very large fortune; he died in 1734 and bequeathed his fortune to his nephews, Matthew Lamb and his brother Robert; how they were his nephews and who their father was I haven't the least idea, nor have I ever been able to find out. Matthew Lamb also studied the Law," he continued, "and then he married Miss Coke of Melbourne, who was a great heiress; he became Sir Matthew Lamb, and left a very large fortune to my father, who contrived to get rid of it very speedily; still, *he* has left a good fortune; my father was somehow connected with Lord Bute, and through the interest of Lord North and the Prince of Wales he was made first Baron, then Viscount Melbourne; and in 1815 he was made a Peer of England, also by the Prince of Wales; that's the history of the thing."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Girlhood of Queen Victoria*, II. 69.

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The account needs but little supplementing, and the position of the Lamb family at the time when it gave its most distinguished son to the world is quite clear. Though wealthy, it was neither ancient nor illustrious. The brother of the attorney above mentioned remained in Southwell, and became solicitor to the Coke family, who had been settled since the thirteenth century at Melbourne Hall, eight miles from Derby. His two sons were both uncommonly successful in life. The elder, Robert Lamb, flourished as Bishop of Peterborough during the middle years of the eighteenth century. We know little about him, but he is said to have been "devout and charitable"; he also appears to have remembered the region where charity should begin, for he left a considerable sum of money behind him when he died. Matthew, the younger, took to the Law, and was the real founder of the family. Rather surprisingly—for the original connection of the Lambs with the Cokes appears to have been purely professional—he was allowed to marry the sole heiress of that ancient house, a house which had figured more than once in the pages of English history, and, in the days of Pope and Swift, had produced the original of "Sir Plume" in the *Rape of the Lock*. Matthew Lamb acquired money, position and a baronetcy; he also sat in Parliament for some years. His money he owed partly to his brilliant marriage, partly to inheritance, and partly, it would seem, to a considerable readiness in availing himself of the opportunities of his profession. He held the agencies of the Salisbury and the Egremont estates, and his eminent grandson, who was wont to express himself freely on this

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as on all other topics, used to say that he "did the Cecils out" of some Hertfordshire property around Bocket Hall. He left a title which was to be augmented, and a fortune which was to be diminished, by his son and heir, Peniston; the last named inherited property which, including the accumulations of the good prelate his uncle, is said to have been worth half a million pounds.

Sir Peniston Lamb (1745-1828), first Viscount Melbourne, was no worthy descendant of his able and industrious ancestors; he appears, indeed, to have been an unpleasing person generally. Belonging to the newest nobility, he thought to mitigate the fact by indulging in a lavish expenditure; but, unlike the one of his sons with whom we shall be concerned, he was utterly commonplace in his pursuit of pleasure as well as of politics. His taste may be gauged from his recorded boast that he gave his wife back her marriage portion in diamonds. His education stands confessed in some ill-spelt letters which he addressed to Mrs. Sophia Baddeley, who combined talents for the stage with mercenary affections. This lady became the subject of a biography which, though something handsome would doubtless have been offered for its suppression by several interested parties, its author decided to publish; and the first Lord Melbourne figures prominently therein. In choosing a wife, however, he showed a becoming sense of one of his chief deficiencies, for Lady Melbourne (1752-1818) had brains enough for two. She was Elizabeth, only daughter of Sir Ralph Milbanke, fifth baronet, of Halnaby in the county of York, and brought him a family of which nearly every



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member attained distinction in after life. The eldest son died young. The second son, William, born March 15th, 1779, became second Viscount Melbourne and Queen Victoria's first Prime Minister. Frederick, the third son, became a distinguished diplomatist and a Peer under the title of Lord Beauvale; George, the youngest son, was in Parliament for some time, and assisted his brother at the Home Office during some important years. Emily, the only daughter who grew up, became, by a second marriage, the wife of another Victorian Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston.

General belief assigned to William Lamb a different paternity. It was more than whispered—Greville indeed mentions it as an accepted fact—that his real father was the Earl of Egremont. This nobleman, who died rather appropriately in 1837, belonged to a type which flourished in the eighteenth century, decayed in the early nineteenth, and is now as extinct as the mammoth. He lived a very long and a very full life at Petworth House, the monarch of all he surveyed, exercising a feudal hospitality, and caring for no man. Free to gratify every taste, and gratifying a good many, he was devoted at once to the turf, to agriculture and to art; in this last capacity he became the patron of, among others, Turner and Constable. Years later William Lamb, then Lord Melbourne, was showing Landseer the pictures at Bocket Hall, and the artist, on seeing Egremont's portrait, turned involuntarily and scrutinised the features of his host. "Ah," was the cool reply, "so you've heard that story, have you? It's a damned lie for all that"; then, after a pause and half aloud, "But

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who the devil can tell who's anybody's father?" It must be added that the above rumour found support in the coldness with which the first Lord Melbourne always treated his second son. At what time of his life William Lamb himself became aware of what is only too likely to have been the real cause of this attitude we do not know. But it was probably early on, if we may judge from some observations, of an extraordinary frankness, which were addressed by Scrope Davies to George Lamb at College, and are recorded in one of Byron's letters.

However this may be, William Lamb always declared that he owed everything to his mother, and she was, in truth, a most remarkable woman. Her letters, some of which were recovered and published not long ago by Lady Airie,<sup>1</sup> do a good deal to confirm the great impression that she made on her contemporaries. Ambitious as well as beautiful, she showed herself determined from the first to employ the family wealth in securing careers for her husband and her children. As regards her husband, nature could not be assisted beyond a certain point; still, she did all that a clever wife could do for him, with the result that, as we may surmise, the apathetic gentleman came before long to desire above all things a quiet life. As soon as he had come into his inheritance, Sir Peniston Lamb had purchased one of the two seats appertaining to the famous rotten borough of Ludgershall, and placed himself at the disposal of Lord North. His dull and silent support of that statesman was rewarded by the title of Baron

<sup>1</sup>See *In Whig Society*.

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Melbourne of Kilmore in the peerage of Ireland; his wife pushed him one step up in the same some years later, and also got him appointed Gentleman of the Bed-chamber to the Prince of Wales. "George the Third," remarks Mr. Dunckley, "used his prerogative in one country as a means of governing another. Not for all his fortune would Sir Peniston Lamb have been allowed at that time to win a British peerage." However, Lady Melbourne managed to procure him an English title in 1815, when he became Baron Melbourne of Melbourne in the County of Derby.

If Lady Melbourne's husband was not in himself all that she could desire, he gave her everything she wanted; and, in particular, he enabled her to open an energetic and successful social campaign from the sound base of two houses in the country and one in London. Melbourne Hall, inherited, as we have seen, from the Cokes, was not much frequented by the family, who alternated between Bocket Hall, near Hatfield, and London. In the matter of London houses Lady Melbourne was able, at a comparatively early stage, to oblige no less a person than the Duke of York, by exchanging with him a house on the site of the present Albany for one that is now the Scottish Office. First in Piccadilly, and afterwards in Whitehall, she continued her upward path, dragging her depressing husband after her. Before long she had reached dizzy heights.

The Prince of Wales cast a favourable eye on Lady Melbourne. Melbourne House, already famous for its balls, assemblies and *ridottos*, became accordingly a centre of Whig politics, Whig

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gossip and Whig potations. The society, being mainly that of Carlton House, was more remarkable perhaps for youth and beauty than for the highest respectability. Since Lady Melbourne was never really accepted by the greatest families, and never aimed at giving an exclusively political complexion to her house, it hardly included the innermost circle of the Whig political aristocracy. However, there was never any lack of brains as well as of fashion at Melbourne House, and the hostess, who received letters from her sons which no merely frivolous woman could possibly have received, was able to hold her own with anybody. Fox himself was her constant guest. We hear of Windham also, of Canning as a young man, and of some other shining lights who were still in their earlier and better days. The Prince of Wales had not hopelessly degenerated; Sheridan was often sober; Brummell was still the mould of fashion and the glass of form, and had not yet been driven across the Channel by the importunity of creditors. As a social leader Lady Melbourne was notable for a discretion that preserved appearances, and a tolerance that forbore to enquire. She was, in fine, an eminently accomplished woman of the world—charming, intelligent, exceedingly determined and quite unscrupulous. Her husband being what he was, she had all the more incentive to apply her abilities resolutely on behalf of her children.

The children were naturally left mainly to servants and governesses down at Bocket Hall; but their mother, in such intervals as she could spare from her duties to society, showed an

interest in their welfare. Proud of their beauty, as she might well have been, she persuaded Reynolds to paint her three elder sons in a group which was engraved under the title of "Fraternal Affection"; George, the baby, received allegorical presentation at the hands of Maria Cosway as, of all things, "The Infant Bacchus." Peniston, the eldest son, showed no particular promise; William, on the other hand, was far more winning and intelligent. He went to his first school at nine, and to Eton at eleven. Many years later he liked to entertain Queen Victoria and others with reminiscences of his school-days, reminiscences that confirm the impression of anarchy tempered by sudden and violent irruptions of authority which was the order of things at Eton until well on into the nineteenth century. One of them is surprising; it was a Sixth Form boy, afterwards the famous Dr. Keate, who was young Lamb's second in his first fight; it was probably his last, for he was not a pugnacious lad. As regards education in the narrower sense, Lamb's later utterances on this topic were imbued with a playful scepticism which was regrettable in one under whose nominal auspices the foundations of our state system were to be laid. He became, indeed, a rather severe critic of the old-fashioned public school education, though he allowed it some merits. The system, he thought, did at any rate not interfere with natural growth; the boys were left free to call their souls their own; the pace, whether in work or in play, was not forced. However, if a boy desired to read for himself, there was nothing to prevent his doing so. A strong taste for reading is generally



LADY MELBOURNE AND PENISTON LAMB

*(From a mezzotint after Sir Joshua Reynolds.)*



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developed early, if developed at all, and it was very likely during his school-days that Lamb acquired a love of books which was to render him, with the possible exception of Gladstone, the best read of English Prime Ministers.

He carried in due course to Trinity College, Cambridge, probably all that Eton could give him, for he left in the Sixth. At College he failed to distinguish himself, except in one particular. He won the "Declamation" prize for a composition on "The Progressive Improvements of Mankind"—a subject on which later he was to modify his views. This essay had one consequence; Fox received a copy, sent, we may be sure, by the author's mother. With his usual extraordinary good-nature he went out of his way to quote it in the House of Commons as the work of a "very young orator." It might, he thought, "perhaps savour too much of the sanguine confidence of youth to stand the test of a rigid philosophical enquiry," but it was at least "cheerful and consolatory."

But Lamb's education did not end with Cambridge. Though Cambridge never sank so low as Oxford, the intellectual state of both Universities at the end of the eighteenth century justified the contempt with which they were regarded by the progressive opinion of the day. The "grand tour" had been the normal completion of a gentleman's education until recently; but the Continent was now closed owing to the war. A more bracing, if less agreeable, substitute had been found in Scotland. It became the custom for young men of ability, especially if they were designed for public



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life, to attend one or other of the two larger Scottish Universities which were then at the height of their reputation; Palmerston, Lansdowne, Dudley and Lord John Russell all passed a year or two at Edinburgh, where they studied law, mathematics and political economy. Glasgow was selected for William and Frederick Lamb, who spent there the academical session of 1799 and part of that of 1800. They lived in the house, and attended the lectures, of Professor John Millar, a man of note in his day, and a pioneer in the study of Comparative Law. The democratic atmosphere of a Northern university, the total change in surroundings from anything that they could hitherto have known, must have been a novel and salutary experience for the two young men. And it says something for both of them that they do not appear to have quarrelled with an educational course that offered a strong contrast to Cambridge. "There is nothing heard of in this house but study," wrote Frederick Lamb. "During the whole of the day we are seldom out of the house or the lecture-rooms for more than an hour, and after supper, which finishes a little after eleven, the reading generally continues till near two. Saturday and Sunday are holidays, but on Monday we have examinations on Millar's lectures."<sup>1</sup> William Lamb's letters to his mother, of which a few have been preserved among the *Melbourne Papers*, are certainly not those of an idler; they show, in fact, a somewhat priggish tone which is most unlike that of the mature man; and they also make us wonder how far his wide and

<sup>1</sup>Papers, 5.

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cultivated interests in letters and in politics were shared by others of the gilded youth of that time. The writer discusses the latest novel ; the merits of his own verses ; a newly-discovered ode of Sappho, with a message to the Duke of Bedford thereupon ; the infatuation of Ministers in pursuing the war with France ; the line that ought to be taken by Mr. Fox ; the greatness of Bonaparte—all this in a manner which throws light upon Lady Melbourne as well as himself. For he writes to his mother exactly as he might write to a friend of his own age and sex.

Eton, Cambridge and Glasgow having thus done what they could for him ; Melbourne House, Devonshire House, Petworth House, Holland House and other Whig houses having provided him with all the knowledge of the social and political world that could possibly have been acquired by three-and-twenty, William Lamb emerged upon society a very finished product. His personal appearance was all that his mother could desire. He had acquired all the accomplishments befitting his age and station ; he had, in particular, a pretty turn for verse-making ; and his general abilities were obviously excellent. With birth, brains and wealth, the world might have seemed before him, where to choose. Nevertheless, Lady Melbourne contemplated her son with a satisfaction that was not altogether without alloy. His disposition appeared to be somewhat unenterprising and diffident, and to find all that it needed in the enjoyment of the day that was passing over him. However, it was evident that, since he was a second son, he would have to find a career. As

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to what that career should be he did not seem to have any definite opinion himself, and his mother was at some loss to decide. Her first idea was surprising. Remembering that there had been a bishop in the family, she thought that William might well take Holy Orders; he would then, she doubtless reflected, be reasonably certain of securing a spiritual peerage at any rate on the Irish Establishment, just as his respected father had secured a temporal peerage in the same country. What her son thought about it we do not know; but Lord Egremont, on being consulted by Lady Melbourne, negatived the idea at once and emphatically; William, he said, must go to the Bar. To the Bar, accordingly William went, but, within a year or so of his call, an event occurred which completely changed his position. His elder brother died unmarried at the beginning of 1805.

Lady Melbourne now saw her favourite son an eldest son, free to adopt, as she was resolved he should adopt, a political career, and free also to marry. She was about to settle her daughter most successfully on the head of a great Whig house; and, as she was no doubt aware, her son had, some time before this, placed his affections in an equally desirable quarter. Lady Caroline Ponsonby—or “Caro” as she was called by her friends, and ought no doubt to be called by an up-to-date biographer—was in her nineteenth year in 1805. She came of the highest Whig stock, being the only daughter of the third Earl of Bessborough by his wife, who was sister to the Duchess of Devonshire. Of a slight and boyish figure, she had “large hazel

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eyes" and golden hair, which she wore—and it is not the only touch of modernity about her—cut short; her voice was soft, and distinguished by a fashionable drawl; these, however, were the least of her attractions, for, though striking in appearance, she was not beautiful. But as soon as ever she opened her lips and her face lit up, her charm, cleverness and vitality made her the centre of an admiring circle; especially remarkable was the manner with which she could discuss the intimacies of her toilet, and of her soul, with gentlemen who had only just been introduced to her. Being possessed of a lively imagination rather than of any desire to deceive, Lady Caroline could at no time of her life be relied upon to speak the strict truth; if she could have been, her husband's biography would be a shade less obscure in some respects; but the account which, years later, she gave to a friend of her early life may doubtless be believed. "She gave," Lady Morgan writes, "curious anecdotes of high-life—children neglected by their mothers—children served on plate in the morning—no one to attend them—servants all at variance—ignorance of children on all subjects—thought all people were dukes or beggars—did not know how bread and butter were made—wondered if horses fed on beef—so neglected in her education she could not write at ten years old."

Lady Caroline may also be allowed to speak for herself. "I was a trouble," she writes, "not a pleasure all my childhood, for which reason, after my return from Italy, where I was from the age of four until nine, I was ordered by the late Dr. Warren neither to learn anything nor see anyone,

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for fear of violent passions and strange whims they found in me should lead to madness, of which, however, he assured everyone there were no symptoms. . . . My angel mother's ill-health prevented my living at home: my kind aunt Devonshire took me; the present Duke loved me better than himself, and everyone paid me those compliments shown to children who are precious to their parents or delicate and likely to die. I wrote not, spelt not, but I made verses, which they all thought beautiful—for myself, I preferred washing a dog, or polishing a piece of Derbyshire spar, or breaking in a horse, to any accomplishment in the world."

Dr. Warren's orders do not appear to have been carried out very thoroughly or very long; perhaps the character of the young patient rendered it difficult. Lady Caroline had, at a tender age, heard a great deal about William Lamb, as a young, clever and exceedingly good-looking disciple of the adored Fox; she had, according to her own account, fallen in love with him before ever she had seen him. A strange friendship did in fact grow up between the extraordinary child of thirteen and the eminently correct youth of twenty; it ripened into something more; but, in view of his uncertain prospects, Lamb felt that he could not ask her to marry him. This obstacle being now removed, he promptly did so. Lady Caroline obligingly offered to accompany him anywhere in the disguise of his clerk, but told him that her temper was so passionate that she ought not to marry him. She also told him, we may be sure, a great deal more about a disposition which he was soon to have the fullest opportunity of studying for himself; he replied,

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we may be equally sure, with all the promises and protestations that were to be expected from one in his condition. Perhaps—for love is blind—he even had hopes of moulding this fascinating young creature, and leaving her with just so much of her native wildness as might add a zest to domestic felicity.

The only immediate cloud on the horizon arose from Lamb's ungracious father, who insisted on restricting his allowance to a mere £2000 a year, a sum on which he could hardly have been expected to support a wife. Lady Bessborough, indeed, did not much like the connection for her daughter. Nor, though allowing him many good qualities, did she altogether approve of her prospective son-in-law; he seemed to believe in nothing in particular; however, before very long she changed her opinion completely, and he became a "noble creature" in her eyes. Lamb and Lady Caroline were married in June 1805; the bride had an attack of temperament on the wedding day, and made a scene. In view of their straitened circumstances, the newly-married couple occupied a floor of Melbourne House which had been prepared for their reception, an arrangement which also enabled Lady Melbourne to keep an eye on them. Equally gratifying to a mother's heart was Emily Lamb's marriage to Earl Cowper, which established her at Pan-shanger, within a few miles of her family at Brocket Hall. Moreover, to provide William with at any rate the opportunity of a political career was now the easiest thing possible, and a seat was acquired for him at Leominster. Lady Melbourne was content.

## CHAPTER II

### *EARLY MANHOOD*

William Lamb was returned to the House of Commons at the end of January 1806. It was a critical time, at home and abroad. Trafalgar had just been won, and Austerlitz lost; Pitt died in that very January, Fox was to follow him a few months later. However, the general life of the nation remained surprisingly unchanged by the incidents of the prolonged struggle with Napoleon; Austerlitz, Jena, the Peninsular War, though they might whiten the hair of statesmen, made little immediate difference to the business or the pleasure of more than a fraction of the home population. Nor do they appear to have appreciably affected the family with which we are now concerned. Lady Melbourne's sons, not having embraced the military or the naval profession, were not called upon to serve their country in any dangerous capacity; William was about to combine a life of politics with a life of fashion; Frederick was beginning a diplomatic career; George was going to the Bar. Nor did the entertainments in Whitehall grow any smaller or any earlier, if we may judge from an entry which Miss Berry made in her Journal in April 1808—at a time, that is, just after Napoleon had despatched 80,000 men to Spain. "I went to Lady Caroline Lamb's," she writes, "an immense assembly. We came away at half-past

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twelve, and walked beyond the Admiralty to the carriage. Many of the company were not away till near three, and the Prince of Wales and a very few persons supped below in Lady Melbourne's apartment, and were not gone till past six, Sheridan of the number, who was completely drunk."

Melbourne House, where Fox reigned supreme, was one of the Whig houses that had never approved of the war. That statesman had imparted to his adherents an attitude which from being Francophile had become anti-national, and he had set a fashion to the younger men who frequented the hospitable mansion. They found it easier to sneer at George III, to glorify Napoleon, and to deplore the obstinacy of the benighted Tories who insisted that he must be fought down, than to emulate their leader's eloquence, his warm and wide sympathies, and his surpassing kindness of nature. Of his love of letters indeed some of them had a share; illiteracy was by no means fashionable, and versifying was an esteemed accomplishment. The great Brummell himself—with whom William Lamb consorted for a space—devoted part of such time as he could spare from the adornment of his person to the cultivation of a bowing acquaintance with polite letters; George Lamb, again, was a minor dramatist, and also published a verse translation of Catullus which held its own for many years in "Bohn's Classical Library." A fine taste in emotion was also indulged. The "sensibility" of the later eighteenth century meets us everywhere, and in other than literary directions—in parliamentary orators such as Fox and Sheridan, in men of action such as



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Nelson; it flourished in spite of, or because of, the coarseness which lay just below the surface of a highly polished society. Tears, manly tears, came not infrequently to the eyes of gentlemen who were not otherwise known for depth and tenderness of feeling; their language also was apt to rise to considerable heights on great occasions. Lady Bessborough gives us in one of her letters the words in which her son-in-law announced to her the news of Pitt's death; they sound strange to-day; but Lamb carried this trait, with other elegancies of his youth, into an alien century.

The social side of Melbourne House was undoubtedly interesting, if not in all respects edifying. Its political side, including the earlier public career of its hopeful representative, was much duller. Young William Lamb was an ardent devotee of "liberty,"—and its spirit breathes in some doleful verses which he inscribed to Fox's memory. But his enthusiasm, like that of other young and aristocratic Whigs, noticeably cooled when vulgar and noisy demands were made by those who were outside the privileged class, and were a little later on to become known as radical reformers, or Radicals. It does not appear that such of Lady Melbourne's young men as were in Parliament allowed political studies or political duties to interfere seriously with their amusements. We hear of only one among Lamb's early acquaintances who was an industrious apprentice, and had set himself to master financial and commercial questions. This was William Huskisson, but he was on the Tory side, and, though connected with Lady Melbourne by marriage, appears to have been

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thought little of by that lady. As regards her son, she now had the satisfaction of seeing him admitted into full membership of a society from which she herself, for all her husband's wealth and her friendship with the Heir Apparent, would hardly have obtained more than a distant recognition.

Thanks to the patronage of Fox, and to his marriage, William Lamb had been adopted into the innermost circle of Whiggery, that of the Cavendishes, Russells, Spencers, Petty-Fitzmaurices, Greys and Ponsonbys. It was in families such as these that the pure word of the Whig gospel, the esoteric traditions of Whig statecraft were held to reside; to be a true and authentic Whig was still almost as much a matter of birth as of creed. Various circumstances had combined to give high Whiggery this peculiar family complexion. A group of Whig statesmen had been intimately connected with the Revolution of 1688 and the establishment of the Protestant Succession. Throughout a long period of the eighteenth century, when the Tories were not identified with the most lively loyalty to the House of Hanover, the Whigs had had everything their own way, and their chiefs had flourished exceedingly. The leading families had ramified into a clan which was held together by obvious ties of interest and complicated ties of blood; "Damn the Whigs, they're all cousins," exclaimed Lamb when, in after years, he himself was called upon to preside over this highly tenacious "connection." Nor, again, had Whiggery ever been so popular a thing in itself as Toryism. Its strength lay among the commercial classes and in the towns; it had struck but slight

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roots in the country districts, which then comprised by far the larger part of the population.

With the accession of George III the palmy days of Whiggery had come to an end; the Whig aristocracy was soon compelled to fight for its political existence against attempts at independent and personal rule by the King. Being in need of a platform for that purpose, it had found one in a reassertion of popular liberties, and in a demand for real Party Government. But what had originally been little more than a set of catchwords had, owing mainly to Fox, been transmuted into a genuine body of principles—principles which, though not democratic, were liberal. The Whigs now stood for the removal of the disabilities which affected the many Irish and the few English Roman Catholics; for the abolition first of the Slave Trade and then, if possible, of Slavery itself; and for a certain degree of parliamentary reform. But they were by no means anxious for any thorough-going change in the basis of parliamentary representation, and were almost as disinclined as the Tories to weaken the control of the territorial aristocracy over the House of Commons. The French Revolution had frightened many of them, as it had frightened the great majority of their countrymen. And they were also influenced by a constitutional theory which lay at the core of Whiggery, and held its ground until well on into the nineteenth century—the theory of “checks and balances.” The British Constitution was regarded as a balance of monarchical, aristocratic and popular elements; if one of these elements were to become supreme at the expense of the

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other two, its distinctive virtue would be impaired, and "liberty" would be in danger. But, whereas it was the encroachment of the Crown that the Whigs had had to resist in the later eighteenth century, things had now advanced so far that neither the Crown nor the House of Lords was a formidable check on the House of Commons. On the contrary, it seemed that the "balance" might now be upset by the House of Commons itself, especially if it were to be democratised, and "property and intelligence" thus deprived of their due weight in the counsels of the nation.

Apart from the war, indeed, there was but little upon which the two parties differed during the opening years of the nineteenth century. Party divisions were far from clear-cut in those days; not all the Tories were against Catholic emancipation, nor all the Whigs in favour of parliamentary reform. The main position for which the Whigs had formerly contended had been won; no Tory now dreamed of disputing the supremacy of Parliament, or the accountability of Ministers thereto. To criticise the purpose and conduct of the war, and to keep alive the question of the Catholic claims and of a more liberal policy towards Ireland, were the main items of their policy. But they were much divided in opinion; being more capable of ideas than their opponents, they were so much the more liable to internal disunion. The French Revolution had split them in two. Fox had broken with the conservative section of the party, and taken with him a remnant which, though weak in numbers, was strong in talent. This remnant was destined to keep liberal

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principles from totally perishing among the governing class during many dark years, and, a generation later, to head a national movement; for the time being it was impotent. The Foxites were for many years to be led by Grey, Holland and Lansdowne in the Lords, and in the Commons, after Fox's death, by Ponsonby, a relative of Lamb's wife. There were also the Grenvillite Whigs, a small but powerful connection who had broken with Fox on the war question, and were, some years after Waterloo, to coalesce finally with the Tories. A third and very interesting group had little in common with the other two, being of a radical complexion. It was nicknamed the "Mountain," owing to its supposed Jacobinical tendencies, and comprised some men who, unlike some of the "Philosophical Radicals" later on, were animated by a genuinely humanitarian spirit. Whitbread, Romilly and Bennet did their best during these years for many good causes that were in advance of public opinion—for the agricultural labourers, for the chimney-sweep boys, for prison reform and for popular education. But it was obviously not a favourable time for reform of any kind, even though the Whigs were on the point of attaining the only spell of power that they were to enjoy for the next quarter of a century. Pitt died; whereupon Fox and other Whig leaders took office in the short-lived Ministry of "All the Talents."

Such was the position of affairs when Lamb took his seat in the House of Commons. He did so under excellent auspices; the House was full of his own, and more especially of his wife's relations,

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connections, friends and acquaintances. Lady Bessborough, however, was doubtful; "My son-in-law," she wrote, "will be reckoned too scrupulous and conscientious for a good party man," and she was right. Everything possible was done for a young man who was generally regarded as a promising recruit, and he was put forward to speak on various important occasions. But he made no mark, and gradually drifted away from Foxite Whiggery as regards the all-absorbing question of the time. Lamb, in fact, soon came to see the root weakness of Fox's whole attitude towards Napoleon and the war, an attitude which even he was compelled to modify at the very last; it was based on generous sentiment, but offered no reasoned guidance, no constructive plan, for any practical policy. The Ministry of "All the Talents" has one title to fame indeed; it secured, as Fox's last act, the abolition of the Slave Trade. But it soon demonstrated that it had no talents for war, and fell foul of the King in a matter touching the Catholic claims. The country proved to be behind the succeeding Ministries of Portland, Perceval and Liverpool, which were prepared to prosecute the war, and to shelve any serious question of internal reform while the country was struggling for existence. These soon became Lamb's own sentiments.

We find him, indeed, supporting some reforming measures that were brought forward during the years 1806 to 1812, including Romilly's abortive attempts at prison reform. But it was a hopeless time for a young man of liberal tendencies. He necessarily missed the systematic training which

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might have been afforded him by the activities of a united and powerful Opposition. Nor was there any outstanding personality to whom he might have attached himself except Canning, who was then with the Tories. The age of Pitt, Fox and Burke was over; that of the remarkable group of men with whom he was himself to be associated in later life had not begun; to Canning, indeed, Lamb was attracted at once, but nothing immediately came of it. A Member of Parliament in those days was free to vote as he pleased to a surprising extent; the rotten borough system, whatever else may be said of it, could easily favour independence; but Lamb's lukewarmness in their cause had offended his party. He lost his seat in the General Election which followed Lord Liverpool's entry on his fifteen years' premiership (1812), and he did not attempt to obtain another for four years.

However ineffective Lamb may have been in Parliament, and however much he may have tired of parliamentary routine during some very depressing years, his mind had not been idle. A vein of pensiveness, of independent reflection on men and things, is abundantly evident in a desultory sort of diary which he had begun to keep during these years. He became, especially, a keen and thoughtful student of the Peninsular War. He had now outgrown his youthful affection for Napoleon, but could appreciate his greatness on a side which was not evident to most Englishmen of that time. For example—Why was it, we find him asking, that some others of the subjected countries of Europe had not risen against Napoleon

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as Spain had done? He much suspected that their acquiescence in Napoleon's administration was owing to the fact that it was after all much better than anything to which they had been previously accustomed—he was obviously more congenially occupied in reading and reflecting than in attendance at the House of Commons. The only real significance of his first spell of public life lies in his early exhibition of a detached outlook on affairs, a detachment which was to distinguish him as a mature statesman, and to render him well fitted for political leadership at a time of rapid transition.

But this period lay very far indeed in the future, and Lamb's first spell in Parliament had, after six years, come to nothing. For the moment he seems to have felt his exclusion severely, but he told his mother that he did not like to ask his father for more money to contest an election or to buy a seat. However, his attendance at the House of Commons had been desultory for some time ; what with friends, books, London, and such country houses as he chiefly affected, life was a very pleasant affair. On the surface, he seemed to have been leading a sufficiently aimless existence. But, in truth, the ordinary incidents of such a life as his must have been, even if he did no more than take them as they came, would have necessarily given him much that was denied to less favoured mortals. Moving intimately among a real governing class, the son of a great landowner and of Lady Melbourne, with friends and relations in the higher grades of every branch of the public service, his position would in itself have provided anyone of even moderate intelligence and aptitude with



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something of the fundamental equipment of a statesman, with a shrewd sense for men and affairs, an instinctive knowledge of the way things get done in the world, and of the motives, direct and indirect, which influence those who do them. And Lamb's intelligence, however lazily exerted, was very far from ordinary. Indolent indeed he always was, so far as circumstances would let him be. But the good-nature with which everyone agreed to credit him was not the result of indolence, not of the sort which Hazlitt maliciously but acutely ascribes to Lord Eldon. It was a far more positive thing, the outcome of qualities which, though sometimes dissembled, were fundamentally affectionate and sensitive. But there was one drop of bitter in his cup; his wife—whose further acquaintance we shall make immediately—had begun to worry him. "Before I was married," we find him noting in his Commonplace Book, "whenever I saw the children and the dogs allowed, or rather encouraged, to be troublesome in any family, I used to lay it all to the fault of the master of it, who might at once put a stop to it if he pleased. Since I have married I find this was a very rash and premature judgment."

The Prince of Wales had continued his favour to the Lamb family in spite of the grave political disappointment to which he had subjected the Whigs on his virtual succession to the Throne, and the advent of the Regency did nothing to diminish the *éclat* of Melbourne House. Of its master we hear very little during these years, and that little not good; the only history, indeed, on which the first Lord Melbourne has left the least trace is

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of the scandalous kind. If we can believe—but perhaps we cannot believe—the *Memoirs* with which Harriette Wilson spread consternation among the highest families, that deplorable nobleman was only too anxious to promote an amour of his son Frederick's with the fashionable courtesan; while Frederick was perfectly willing to introduce her to his brother William, knowing all the time that she would not be to William's taste. As for Lady Melbourne, it would require, to do her justice, the pen of him who portrayed the Baroness de Bernstein and Lady Kew. She was now a very great lady, about sixty, but exceedingly well-preserved; good-humoured enough while not crossed, but, when she was, very terrifying to behold; with a worldly wisdom fortified by a rich experience; quick to note and to enjoy every move on the stage of Vanity Fair. The virtues of her head especially impressed her eldest son; "Not merely clever and engaging, but the most sagacious woman I ever knew," he used to say of her; as for those of her heart, "Lady Melbourne is a good woman after all, for there is something she will stop at," remarked another observer, who had good reason to know the lengths to which she was capable of proceeding. Looking back on a life which, if it would not have entirely satisfied the moralist, would probably have afforded some excellent material to the novelist, she might well have congratulated herself on the position in which her family now found themselves; and there was more to come, for her husband was to be made an English peer before very long. But she had some cause to be dissatisfied with her eldest son, anxious

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though he was to please her in most things, and more cause to be dissatisfied with her eldest son's wife, who showed no such anxiety.

Lady Caroline Lamb was not bad at heart, but she did like to have a good time. So far, Lady Melbourne would have been the first to sympathise, and it certainly behoved the future mistress of Melbourne House to keep herself well before the world. Still, there was reason in all things; and the celebrity which Lady Caroline had acquired was the natural reward of her talents and her temperament, but was not of the kind desired by the mother of a potential Cabinet Minister. She had, indeed, only too good reason to be disappointed with the way in which William's marriage had turned out after six or seven years. Lamb and his wife had been really in love with one another at the start, and appear to have got on very well for some time. Three children were born to them, of whom two died in infancy. Though temperamentally opposed, they had some definite interests in common. They read together; and Lamb appears to have taught his wife a good deal, including Greek—at least it is difficult to imagine from whom else she can have learned enough of the language to quote Theocritus in the original, as she does in one of her letters to her husband. But they gradually drifted into semi-detachment. Lady Caroline's capacity for indiscretion was unlimited; the society in which she lived was anything but censorious where a young and charming woman was concerned; and Lamb, we may be sure, was not disposed to be very exacting. However, there was a more watchful

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eye than his fixed upon all her comings and goings; she was still living in Melbourne House, on the floor above that occupied by its mistress. That lady had already had occasion—in one instance of which we know, and doubtless in others—to rebuke her severely for indulging in some very open flirtations, and to remind her in the most forcible terms of “the Decencies imposed by Society.” As for her husband, he appears to have shrugged his shoulders at escapades which—for there was never anything furtive about Lady Caroline—probably looked worse than they were; though, as we gather from one of her letters, she occasionally had the satisfaction of rousing him from an attitude which she must have found exceedingly trying. Then, after a storm, he would relapse into a half-amused, half-resentful reconciliation; after all, it was her nature so to be; he did not quite see what was to be done about it. And, moreover, he was always in and out of love with her, for, if often exasperating, she was as often delightful.

“Strange graces still, and stranger flights she had,  
Was just not ugly, and was just not mad;  
Yet ne’er so sure our passion to create,  
As when she touched the brink of all we hate.”

—Pope’s lines have been applied to Lady Caroline, who, whatever else may be said about her, does appeal to the imagination, and enlarge our vision of human accomplishment. She knew, besides Greek, French and Italian; she could draw, showing a real talent for caricature, and was an excellent musician. With all this, she was anything but a blue-stocking, and proved herself equal, and more

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than equal, to the most varied demands of society. In whatever pursuit she might happen to be engaged at the moment, whether in flirting, in riding—in which she was absolutely fearless—in dancing, in private theatricals or in general conversation, she invariably maintained a certain distinction which left no party complete without her presence; the fact that she did not care in the least what she did or said merely added to her fascination. Her conversation is said to have been entirely about herself; seeing that her self was one of an infinite variety, her hearers had no reason to complain on that score. She is, indeed, not easy to characterise briefly; but the resources of our language have been extended since her time, and she may fairly be termed a “sensationalist.” However, this is a biography of her husband; and he, greatly though she wronged him, would certainly not have thanked us for judging her more harshly than he judged her himself. Her uncontrollable impulses were predominantly generous; her kindness to those less fortunately circumstanced than herself was unbounded; towards her equals she displayed a total absence of envy, hatred and malice. So far as concerns one of her manifold activities, though she had doubtless done considerable execution before 1812, she does not appear to have met her match. Events were now to provide him, and in a tragic fashion indeed for herself.

It is difficult for us to-day to imagine Byron's entry into London; there seems to have been nothing at all like it since; and many years have passed since the last survivors of that generation

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were alive to tell the tale. The older men and women of 1812 had themselves to go back for a parallel to the appearance, thirty years before, of the younger Pitt. Utterly different as the poet and the statesman were in every point of character and circumstance, yet the impression that they made on their contemporaries was not dissimilar—the impression of a marvellous development at twenty-three, of a conscious unlikeness to other men, of an extraordinary destiny in reserve. And in Byron's case something of this impression persists to this day. "To us," wrote Macaulay, "Byron is still a man young, noble and unhappy. To our children he will be merely a writer." Macaulay was mistaken. Behind Byron's poetry and his letters alike we still feel a sense of personal power which Matthew Arnold felt and expressed more than half a century ago; which derives part of its fascination from a strain of real malignity in him that fuller knowledge has revealed; which still leads biographers to attempt the astonishing story of his life, the unsolved enigma of his character.

After an unpromising introduction to letters as well as to life, Byron had vanished for two years. He had now returned from his travels, had published the first two cantos of *Childe Harold*, and had made a successful speech in the House of Lords. Resenting a slighted youth, and conscious of the possession of powers which he was determined to exploit, he found himself suddenly as famous as even he could wish. Lady Caroline was, of course, on fire to meet the new poet, and saw him for the first time at an evening party. Recognising at once a foeman worthy of her steel,

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she opened the campaign according to methods so old and so well approved that they scarcely merit description. First of all, she would not let him be introduced to her; but her professed reason, that he was "mad, bad and dangerous to know," sounds very like a subsequent flight of fancy. So at least it appeared to Abraham Hayward, an aged and unfeeling man of the world who must have heard Byron and Lady Caroline discussed hundreds of times by people who knew them both, and tells us that Byron was not likely to have made that impression on a first encounter.

After the inevitable explanation, Byron asked and obtained leave to call at Melbourne House. He arrived, and aroused the most intense interest in the bosoms of both its hostesses. We may be sure that he fell at once to discussing with Lady Caroline many absorbing subjects, such as "the nature of love, the use and beauty of the Greek language, the pleasures of maternal affection, and the insipidity of all English society."<sup>1</sup> It was shocking to think that so marvellous a spirit should be depressed by a lack of one of the basest of commodities; however, as she wrote in her first letter to him, "all her jewels were at his service." In a very short time the romantic pair were deep in what—since there was no secrecy about it—it would be hardly correct to call an intrigue; and, during the London season of 1812, they divided between them the attention of the polite world. Lady Caroline drank eagerly, and at the source, of a stream which was to infect a whole generation; Byronism,

<sup>1</sup>From *Glenarvon*; see also Rogers' *Table Talk* (1856) p. 231.

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incarnate in its creator, turned her head; she succumbed to a passion which she did not attempt to restrain or to conceal. In a novel which she subsequently wrote, the "Childe" is portrayed as talking up to and even beyond his character, through a succession of the most hectic scenes. She appears, from her own account, to have gone into the affair with her eyes open; Byron is represented as having been at pains to inform her that she little knew what she was doing in abandoning an excellent husband, and linking her fate with that of one who was the victim of a mysterious dispensation, and doomed to remain apart from his fellows. Her eyes showed him the power that he was acquiring over her: she must beware; it was exceedingly doubtful if Love was for such as him; the never-dying worm was feeding upon his heart, and all beneath was seared.

However this may be, some of the traditional accompaniments of high romance were certainly not wanting; Lady Caroline saw to that. Dallas, Byron's clerical friend, was in the latter's rooms one day when a note from her was delivered by "a fair-faced delicate boy of thirteen or fourteen years old," dressed in a striking costume which the deponent proceeds to describe; but he shrewdly suspected that the visitor was not a page, and not of the male sex. Lady Caroline wrote Byron the most ecstatic letters; she also wrote to his valet; and it was probably this last proceeding which led him to write her a well-known letter. While allowing her to be "the cleverest, most agreeable, absurd, amiable, perplexing, dangerous, fascinating little thing that lives now or ought to have



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lived 2000 years ago," he regretted that her talents were "unfortunately coupled with a total want of common conduct." This famous *liaison* has, like everything else connected with Byron, been the subject of much tender solicitude and minute research. But a biographer of Lady Caroline's husband may be excused, and even applauded, if he refrains from any attempt at adding to our knowledge of the subject, and confines his remarks to the obvious reflection that, when two such people come together, their connection is bound to be exciting while it lasts, but will not last long. Byron cooled in due course; Lady Caroline's moods were too many for him. But she unfortunately did not; her existence, which had belonged hitherto to the realm of comedy, now took a very different turn; she lost her mental balance altogether. After various alarms and excursions, she was persuaded to accompany her family and her husband to Ireland, where she had a bad breakdown. But she continued to write to Byron, and he at length dismissed her in a letter which has been severely judged; it is indeed not a nice letter, but it must be regretfully admitted that he had received provocation. She replied by getting up a fantastic scene at Bocket Hall, when she burned him in effigy; but, even so, she could not give him up. She wrote to him again and again; his intense exasperation is writ large in his correspondence with Lady Melbourne. He believed, later on, that she had dropped hints as to himself and Augusta Leigh; if she did, we may be sure it was from carelessness and not from malice. In any case, he

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came to speak of her with a savagery that was perfectly unmitigated.

If there was one person in Melbourne House who kept perfectly calm throughout these agitating events it was its mistress. "I happen fortunately," Lady Melbourne wrote about this time, "to be gifted with a fund of good-nature and cheerfulness and very great spirits, and have a little more tact than my neighbours; and people call me pleasant because I am always inclined in conversation to enter into the subjects that seem most adapted to the taste of those with whom I happen to be, when they are not too high for aspiration, like some I have lately been with."<sup>1</sup> That great woman did herself no more than justice; to have been at one and the same time the confidante of Byron—for so she was; of the girl whom Byron was later to marry; and, as we may presume, of her son, must be admitted to have been something of an achievement.

Lady Melbourne had, as we have seen, a proper regard for "the Decencies imposed by Society," as well as a very sincere concern for the happiness of her favourite son. She had accordingly frowned upon her daughter-in-law's unconcealed intimacy with Byron; but, her own moral code being no more austere than that of the society which she adorned, she had not regarded the affair from that particular point of view. She had also conceived a species of maternal affection for Byron himself, and the attraction was reciprocal. He would not in any case have been indifferent to the compliment from a woman of her position. But, as is

<sup>1</sup>Airlie, *Whig Society*, p. 143.

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evident enough from letters which must surely be among the most astonishing ever addressed by a man of twenty-four to a woman of sixty-two, he admired her also for her own qualities—"a sort of modern Aspasia," he called her to Lady Blessington. Lady Melbourne was thus not disposed to judge Byron harshly, but on her daughter-in-law she had no mercy. Lady Caroline, in the opinion of that competent judge, was "not a Novice," and could not be regarded "as the Victim of a designing Man." On the contrary, it was her own fault; she had broken the rules, made herself the talk of London, and brought something worse than notoriety and very like ridicule on Melbourne House and on her husband. With Byron it was a different matter, and, when he confided to Lady Melbourne that he thought it high time he was married, she concurred in this opinion, and proceeded to a step which leaves comment dumb. She wrote to her niece, Annabella Milbanke, and asked her what were the qualities that she would desire in a husband. The young lady replied to the effect that her husband need not be a genius; but that, among other qualifications, he must have consistent principles of Duty governing strong and generous feelings, and reducing them under the command of Reason; and that there should be no insanity in the family. Thus encouraged, Lady Melbourne undertook to promote a match which, after some set-backs, was eventually consummated. Her daughter-in-law professed the gravest doubts about its prospects. Miss Milbanke "went to church punctually, understood statistics, and had a bad figure," and

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was by no means likely to satisfy a poet's yearning for soul-fellowship. Had Lady Caroline been a vindictive woman, which she was not, she would soon have tasted of the sweetness of revenge.

She had meanwhile again met Byron, face to face at a ball of Lady Heathcote's. He seems to have made some remark which threw her into a paroxysm; the pitiful scene which occurred is well known; she caught up something and stabbed herself, or attempted to do so. Nor, even when she recovered from this attack, could she free herself from a passion which had shattered her character and paralysed her will. Only when Byron's marriage was approaching did she recover something of sanity, and make up her mind to the inevitable.

It was a tragedy, the tragedy of a richly endowed nature brought to ruin by a diseased strain. In that light it seems to have been regarded by her husband, to whom we must now return.

### CHAPTER III

#### *RETIREMENT AND RETURN*

What, we wonder, were Lamb's feelings during these events, and more especially at the decisive proof of his wife's mental alienation which had been afforded by Lady Heathcote's ball? Whatever they were he seems to have kept them to himself; at any rate, nothing that he said or wrote during this time has come down to us. We get only a fleeting glimpse of him in Byron's correspondence with Lady Melbourne, when he is represented as "wroth to a degree" at some slight that he conceived Byron to have put upon his wife. Byron himself had the highest opinion of him, an opinion which, needless to say, Lamb did not reciprocate. Many years later, he characterised Byron to Queen Victoria as "inconceivably treacherous; I believe he loved treachery." His mother's friendship with Byron he must have disliked intensely.<sup>1</sup> None the less, she seems to have retained his confidence, and to have been allowed to direct him in the way he should go as long as she lived.

Nor do Lady Caroline's letters, which betray a great variety of mood and a marked aversion to dates, throw much real light on her husband's attitude. We find her saying at one time that he

<sup>1</sup>Cf. a letter of Lady Caroline's in the Leveson-Gower correspondence, II. 542.

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was privy to her affair with Byron, and laughed at it; but this is incredible; and it is, in effect, contradicted by other references to her husband as her real protector, and the best man she had ever known. We also find her accusing him of having undermined the excellent principles with which she, an ignorant and innocent girl, had started married life; but it is equally impossible to take this literally. Lady Caroline appears to have been sufficiently precocious even before that interesting period of her existence; her world was that of her husband; what its standards were is revealed by, among other records, that of Byron's London life.

But some of her random accusations no doubt went home, for Lamb was a "man of feeling" in something more than the eighteenth-century sense. If he had failed to take her seriously it would not be surprising; if he had failed to manage her, it need not be a matter of severe reproach to him; the man who could have done so, though his pattern may be laid up in Heaven, has never existed on earth. But we can well believe that, with his indolent ways and his general attitude of airy indifference, he was not the best man to cope with a young woman who was always in extremes, and was subject to rhapsodies and exaltations which he must have found fatiguing. Whatever his feelings may have been, there is no doubt that they resulted in an extraordinary, an almost incredible, forbearance towards his wife. That she had given him no grounds to divorce her it is difficult to believe. But there was no Divorce Court to supply what must, one would suppose, have been a felt want in Regency society; the honour and glory of

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having founded that institution rest with the Victorian Era. Divorce, though by no means impossible, was an exceedingly cumbrous and expensive process in those days, involving, among other things, the promotion of a Bill through Parliament. Lady Melbourne would never have allowed such a scandal; and her son, indeed, had forgiven his wife before he took her away to Ireland. Nor did he even arrange for a separation. Pity, the fascination which she could always exert on him, the wishes of his mother, who boded no good to either from a separation—all these considerations may have influenced him. But, if we look at the story of their relations from first to last, it is difficult not to feel that he was also actuated by doubts as to whether he had not himself been in some degree to blame, by a vague feeling of remorse.

It was not only on his wife that his home life had foundered. Two of his children had died in their infancy, and it would have been better if the third had followed them. His only son, born in 1807, was hopelessly epileptic, and doomed to grow up with the mind of a child in the body of a man. He longed for another child—at one moment in the late crisis Lady Caroline had raised his hopes by saying she was going to have one—but none was ever granted him.

“For twenty years,” wrote Lamb’s great-nephew, the late Earl Cowper, “his life was embittered, his ability repressed, and even his credit with the world temporarily impaired.” But, whatever the world might say, his behaviour was appreciated by those chiefly concerned. With Lady

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Caroline's family he always remained on the most cordial terms, and her brother, Lord Duncannon, was always his close personal and political friend. In later years, again, he had no more staunch admirer than John Cam Hobhouse (Lord Broughton), who was also one of Byron's greatest friends. And it is equally evident from her letters that Lady Caroline herself always relied upon him to stand up for her, and to protect her from the consequences of her numerous and amazing escapades.

These escapades continued for some time after her rupture with Byron; by the autumn of 1815, however, she seems to have recovered something of her mental balance. We hear of the Lambs in Paris at that festive period—Lady Caroline flattering the Duke of Wellington, attracting attention by a daring costume, brightening things up generally, and worrying her husband. Her genius then took a fresh direction. She bethought herself of subserving the cause of religion and morality, of placing herself before the world in an interesting light, and also, to do her justice, of vindicating her husband from any aspersions that had been cast upon him, by writing a novel. Byron had shaken the dust of England from off his feet. While that event, and the scandal which had preceded it, were still recent, she took her long-suffering family unawares by publishing *Glenarvon* (1816).

It is a curious production. Though containing one or two caustic sketches of the Holland House circle, it is not a malicious book, and was conceived in a penitential spirit. Nor, though much of it is absurd enough, is it by any means unreadable;



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and, when the author gets off her incredible hero and her only less incredible heroine, she shows some talent for description and characterisation. But, needless to say, its reception had nothing to do with such literary merits as it possessed; though it was published anonymously, everyone knew its author. It was a frank *roman à clef*; Lord Glenarvon being obviously Byron, who comes between the beautiful and virtuous Calantha (Lady Caroline) and her admirable husband, Lord Avondale; Lady Melbourne and others also appear in unmistakable guise. To treat your friends, or even your enemies, in that manner had not then become fashionable, and the book accordingly made a sensation; Lady Holland, for example, was "sorry to see the Melbourne family so miserable about it."

Lamb himself, it appears, had recently had occasion to take his wife's part as regards some scrapes into which she had got with Lady Holland and others, but this was too much. He only heard of the book's existence, Lady Caroline tells us, on the day it was published. He was aghast. "Caroline," he said, "I have stood your friend till now; I even think you ill used; but if it is true this novel is published, and, as they say, against us all, I will never see you more." Byron complained that her portrait of himself lacked full verisimilitude; Lamb, when he came to read it, might have made a similar complaint. On one count, indeed, Calantha blamed her husband—for displaying a scepticism which, without his intending it, was taken literally and translated into practice by his innocent and imaginative young wife. Otherwise, Lamb found himself portrayed as possessing every

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moral and intellectual virtue; it must have sorely tried his sense of humour. When, again, he learned that "it was perhaps to show him the utility of strict doctrines both of faith and morality that Heaven permitted one so good and noble to be united with one so frail and weak," he doubtless did so with astonishment.

At first indeed—though it is not quite clear—he seems to have thought of carrying his threat into execution. But he relented; Lady Caroline's novel could hardly be said to have been written "against them all"; at any rate, some sort of *modus vivendi* was established between them. And so things went on, uncomfortably enough for the most part. No doubt the very worst of the situation was somewhat alleviated by the fact that they had the run of three large houses, and there is evidence that he at any rate thanked Heaven for his advantages in this respect. We have a record of a conversation on marriage which took place one day at Brocket Hall. Lady Caroline thought it would be an improvement if ladies lived in different houses from their husbands, and if they just called upon one another when so inclined; Lamb preferred the more conventional form of association. He gave it as his opinion, indeed, that matrimony was in general the preferable state. But he hastened to qualify this remarkable admission by observing that those who were not rich ought not to marry at all; "People who were forced to live much together, confined to the same room, the same bed, etc., are like two pigeons put under a basket, which must fight." It was a bad business. At times Lady Caroline drove him nearly frantic;

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on one occasion he positively determined upon a separation. The deed was prepared for signature, and when all the necessary persons were in attendance, he went to speak a few last words to her about their son. But this was fatal; she had him to herself for half an hour, and made good use of the time. The lawyer—so runs the story—and Lady Caroline's brother waited and waited, and at length the last-named went to see what was the matter. He found her seated beside her husband "feeding him with tiny scraps of transparent bread and butter." One more reconciliation had evidently taken place.

We know very little of Lamb's life during a period that must have given a decisive and final turn to his character. Externally, it appears to have been quite uneventful. He was a sensitive man underneath, and his wife's notoriety no doubt made him shrink from society for a time. He seems to have lived a good deal in the country, and is said to have been a good shot, and something of a field naturalist. But there is no doubt of the direction in which he found his chief solace. Baffled without—for the condition of his party during the years before and after Waterloo was not such as to tempt him to return to public life—and more and more thrown in upon himself, he had recourse chiefly to reading. Ancient or modern, Greek or Latin, French or English, nothing came amiss; at what time of his life he began to develop his well-known and extraordinary interest in theology we do not know, but it seems to have been later on. A love of books, strengthened into a habit by the circumstances of these

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years, remained with him always. It saved him from much, from the *ennui* which waits on perpetually satisfied desire, from the weary restlessness which Lucretius, in lines which must have come intimately home to him, depicted as overtaking the forerunners of his own class in the halls of imperial Rome.

The Greek and Latin classics, in particular, became his familiar and abiding companions, as they were of many other men in an age when, as compared with our own, there was infinitely less to read and considerably less to do. In the seventeenth century, says Professor G. M. Trevelyan, public men quoted the Bible, in the eighteenth century they quoted the classics, and in the twentieth they quote nothing. The shades of Cicero and Tacitus, Virgil and Horace, have indeed deserted Westminster, and are never likely to return. But it is not so long since they wholly ceased to haunt its chambers; until well on into the nineteenth century a statesman could still profess a loyalty which has since become almost impossible. The classics provided, before the age of science, the instrument of all higher education other than mathematical; their influence, if exercised most strongly on our literature, was not confined thereto. It operated, if less immediately, on our political life also, and coloured the thought and speech of some of our greatest statesmen. They went back to Athens and Rome for analogies to the working of those "free institutions" which were their especial pride; in the orators, historians and philosophers of antiquity they found some recurrent tides in the affairs of men, some funda-

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mental problems of human government, broadly and luminously illustrated. It was a culture which aimed especially at the formation of accomplished citizens, and, as the term *Literæ Humaniores* implies, was held to reside by no means solely in books, but in the reciprocal action of books and affairs, of life and letters. Such certainly were its fruits in William Lamb, who was able later on, to combine the two sides in a manner which, if more possible then than now, must always have been uncommon. Thus we find him now turning over the question of parliamentary reform in the light of Aristotle as well as of Clarendon, and now instituting a parallel between Fox and Alcibiades in Thucydides; ("First of all the horse-racing and expensive pursuits; secondly, the contempt for the habits and feelings of his own country; thirdly, the power of his understanding, which, joined with the former two, became an object of terror rather than of hope and confidence"). His own brand of Whiggery, his cross-bench position as between the aristocratic and popular elements in the constitution, he was especially fond of illustrating by a quotation from Cicero.<sup>1</sup>

He made little or no use of translations. As regards the history of Greece; "I have read over Leland, Mitford and others," he remarks, "authors of great labour and merit . . . and have retained nothing clear or connected from the perusal. But Herodotus, in the original, has in a few days given me a better knowledge of what is known of the times the story of which he recounts than the

<sup>1</sup>"Mihi semper in animo fuit ut in rostris curiam, in senatu populum defenderem."

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others have in many months, or indeed, I believe, ever would have done." The spirit in which he read the Greek Tragedians may be gathered from his note to a passage in the *Phœnissæ* of Euripides, where the speaker refrains from enumerating the names of each of the enemies who were beleaguering Thebes.

"This passage seems to be a censure upon Aeschylus, who, in the same circumstances, does go through the names of the commanders, but may be taken as a mode of avoiding the servility and competition of the same task. Great proof of the attention that was paid to the art and power of the poet in Athens, that novelty of story seems to have been so little attended to. Succeeding poets seem to have a pride in working upon the stories which had been successfully treated by their predecessors, and simply to see in what instances they could construct the story better. Thus each of the three great tragic poets has a play on the story of Electra. No instance of such competition on our stage except the *Antony and Cleopatra* of Shakespeare and the *All for Love* of Dryden. In England a new tragedy upon Jane Shore would be damned by its very name."

As the years went by his knowledge of books became enormous. Unlike Brougham among his contemporaries, he was not afflicted with the foible of omniscience; of natural science, for example, he was content to remain in ignorance. His reading was rather that of a born man of letters, resembling in kind, if not indeed in degree, that of Macaulay. His reflections on men and things, scattered up and down his letters and papers, have prompted even

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an Edinburgh Reviewer to enthusiasm—to the opinion, indeed, that “if ambition or want had impelled him to adopt the career of a man of letters, he would have rivalled Charles Lamb as an essayist; he might have been the Sainte-Beuve of English literature; and his aphorisms would have placed him by the side of Rochefoucauld and Vauvenarges.”

This is a little too strong, even for a sympathetic biographer. But *Lord Melbourne's Papers* certainly show abundant evidence of a singularly acute and versatile mind. They also witness to a vein of thought and feeling which, if not lying always on the surface, is perceptible enough just below. The writer is never inclined to an optimistic outlook on men and things. Even if his home circumstances had been happier than they were, it is improbable that he would have escaped the intellectual melancholy which affected many of the strongest minds of the age to which he belonged, and has left a marked impression on the later literature of the eighteenth century. It is highly dangerous to generalise on a matter of this kind. But it seems that “the proper study of mankind” was, by that age, regarded as almost exclusively “man,” and man as a social animal. This concentration of interest on man in society was almost entirely undiverted by those other and wider vistas, those non-human interests, which were to be opened up by the science and the philosophy of a later age.<sup>1</sup> Religious faith burned low in the classes untouched by the Evangelical revival. The spectacle of human

<sup>1</sup>See Whittuck, *The “Good” Man of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 140.

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misery was unilluminated by those larger hopes for the amelioration of society or of the race which subsequent generations were to draw from an evolutionist philosophy, nor was it relieved by the romantic interest with which a later literature was to invest the heights, the depths and the complexities of human character. In the political and social spheres this tendency is very evident. Neither Johnson, nor Gibbon, nor Burke entertained much hope for the improvement of society by concerted social action, by institutional reform, or by education; in particular, the idea of the State as a positive and a beneficial agency was quite foreign to their notions. Johnson's

“How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure,”

expressed a sentiment natural to reflective minds in an age when individuality was strong, and the State was weak. Nor had the example of France encouraged an optimistic estimate of what political action could do to hasten the millennium. It delayed reform in England for a generation; even after the reforming era had begun, its impression still persisted on the statesmen who had grown up under its shadow.

Lamb's life continued in an uneventful course for some years after 1812; his youth was passing, and he was on the verge of middle age. When, some ten years before, he had married Lady Caroline, he seems to have been regarded as rather quiet and self-sufficient, a man of more cultivated tastes than most, good-natured and self-indulgent in the ordinary way—on the surface, a fairly



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conventional member of the class to which he belonged. There had indeed always been something in him which would have prevented his relapsing permanently into the satisfied Epicureanism of the society which passes, in circumstances of unspeakable comfort, through Mr. Creevey's vivacious pages. But even at a very early period he appears to have entertained doubts as to the profit which a man hath of all his labours wherein he laboureth under the sun; since then, under the influences of disappointment and misfortune, reflection and study, he had laid the words of the Preacher more deeply to heart. Nothing now seemed particularly worth while; he had none of the ordinary motives for making it so, no incentive whatever to any form of practical activity. Nor was there anything in the society in which he lived, or in his own particular experiences, to lead him to take an exalted view of men and women. If, accordingly, he came out as a cynic, it was the least that might have been expected of him, and—except when he forgot—he continued to sustain the part for the rest of his life. However, since he had anything but a cold heart, he was by no means invariably successful. His cynicism, so far as it went, was the product rather of a deeply felt sense of the irony of things, a sense which every circumstance of his life had combined to accentuate. Born into the most fortunate class of English society, he knew that his birth was, or at any rate was generally supposed to be, shameful. Everything was fair without and false within; provided as he was with everything that wealth could buy, with every means of gratifying an active mind and

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a sensuous temperament, his home life had been wrecked on his wife and his son.

Meanwhile, one great truth had been borne in upon him, and finds expression in an entry in his *Commonplace Book* which seems to date from these years:—"Neither man nor woman," he writes, "can be worth anything until they have discovered that they are fools. This is the first step towards becoming either estimable or agreeable, and until it be taken there is no hope. The sooner the discovery is made the better, as there is more time and power for taking advantage of it. Sometimes the great truth is found out too late to apply to it any effectual remedy. Sometimes it is never found out at all; and these form the desperate and inveterate cases of folly, self-conceit and impertinence." It was one side of a philosophy of life which seems to have stood him in good stead.

Though he had much to embitter him, he never became fundamentally embittered. And he never lost some enthusiasms—the "sensibility," for instance, which led, as many observers remarked, his "eye to brighten and his mind to kindle" at instances of heroic action, or at great passages of literature. Lonely-minded—a sure sign of this was the habit that he had formed of talking to himself—yet loving society; sensitive by nature, and yet doing his best to conceal the fact by flaunting a vocabulary which amounted to a gift; now discoursing of the true, the good and the beautiful, and now retailing post-prandial anecdotes of the fullest flavour, he was maturing into the Melbourne of later years. An unusual man—so he seems to have struck his contemporaries at this time—and

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one of whom, given inclination and opportunity, something considerable might be expected. But if he had died at any time before his fiftieth year, he would have been absolutely unknown to history.

He emerged gradually, and his interest in politics revived. His friend Huskisson was now becoming an important man, a recognised authority on commercial and financial questions; and it was very likely at Huskisson's persuasion that he re-entered Parliament in 1816. But this could not have made much difference to the tenor of his days; in that year, for example, Sheridan died, and Lamb thought of becoming his biographer. To that end he began a course of reading which was at any rate intended to comprise "a course of English comedy from Beaumont to Congreve," and a study of "ancient and modern oratory, Latin, Greek, French and English"; it is not surprising that the biographical part of this undertaking came to nothing. At times he appears to have doubted altogether his capacity for public life. "I can walk," he writes, "in the shrubbery here at Bocket Hall and reason and enlarge upon almost any topic; but in the House of Commons, whether it be from apprehension, or heat, or long waiting, or the tediousness of much of what I hear, a torpor of my faculties almost always overcomes me, and I feel as if I had neither ideas nor opinions, even upon the subjects which interest me most deeply."<sup>1</sup>

It was at the beginning of the terrible years which followed the peace, years of acute distress among

<sup>1</sup>All the foregoing quotations, including those relating to his classical studies, are taken from *Lord Melbourne's Papers*, especially pp. 82 seq.

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the working classes, of smouldering insurrection and conspiracy. The governing class carried, and the commercial class approved, the severest measures of repression. Inconsequently, but naturally, a suffering people found a suffering heroine in the consort of George IV, who seemed to be robbed of her lawful rights by the First Gentleman of Europe in combination with an unpopular Ministry. Queen Caroline returned from her dubious sojourn abroad, and the squalid tragi-comedy of her virtual trial before the House of Lords was accompanied by scenes which, for a short time, seemed to portend a veritable social upheaval.

Throughout this depressing portion of our annals Lamb, a quite unimportant man, was pursuing a parliamentary career as neither a Whig nor a Tory; his position was, in fact, symptomatic of the general situation. Whiggery, though protesting for the most part against the repressive measures of the Government, was otherwise in a state of suspended animation. The main principle for which the Whigs had formerly stood was now obsolescent. Nor had the party yet begun to feel the stimulus of the reforming movement; Grey was nervous of touching the question of parliamentary reform in those stormy times. Lamb had drifted away from the Whigs on the question of the war, and he now drifted further. Conceiving that universal suffrage and annual Parliaments were no remedy for bad trade and bad harvests, and that it was the duty of Government to maintain order at all costs, he supported the Six Acts, just as he had supported the suspension of Habeas Corpus in 1816. He did not believe the country

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was ripe for a fuller measure of democracy, and was very doubtful about the wisdom and the necessity of parliamentary reform. On the other hand, there was an ingredient of sheer stupidity in the Toryism of that day which revolted his intelligence; and, on the question of Catholic emancipation, he was firmly on the Liberal side. He was also independent enough to brave the displeasure of the family friend at Windsor by supporting two motions for the re-insertion of the Queen's name in the Liturgy.

But the popular excitement which accompanied the Queen's return soon subsided owing to the most natural of all causes. Trade revived, and the new reign began under tolerably favourable auspices. It was only five years since Waterloo. No breach had yet been made in the old citadel of Church and State under which, until recently, the vast majority of Englishmen had been content to live. The idea of citizenship was still bound up with that of religious conviction. Church and State were, both in England and Ireland, different sides of the same institution; if you touched the one you touched the other; those who refused to conform to the established religion of the country had, in the estimation of ordinary conservative people, only themselves to thank for the various degrees of political disability from which they suffered. As regards Roman Catholics in particular, to accord the full privileges of citizenship to those whose ultimate allegiance lay outside the realm seemed dangerous as well as unreasonable; Rome was not only an anti-national influence, but had shown herself capable of setting up an

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*imperium in imperio* whenever and wherever she was strong enough to do so. Even the existing system of parliamentary representation found numerous and intelligent defenders, including Canning, Peel, and, for that matter, Lamb himself. Its anomalies, it was thought, had not in practice been found to prevent the House of Commons from being a tolerably faithful representative of the various classes and interests which made up the nation, or from reflecting the national will at times of strong public feeling. In the "scot and lot" boroughs, of which there were a certain number, the franchise was liberal enough. As the Duke of Wellington once put it, the important thing was, not how people got into the House of Commons, but whether they were fit to be there; and there was no reason to think you would get a better lot of men from thirty manufacturing towns than from thirty rotten boroughs. The mass of the people were simply not fit to be entrusted with the vote; if they got it, they would render stable government impossible; "Democratic" was then as frankly abusive a term as "Communist" is now. Local Government still reflected a far less complex age, and was largely in the hands of Justices of the Peace; the Poor Law in particular was, especially in the South, an agency of demoralisation. The old and savage criminal code was still almost unmitigated.

But this ancient order was not destined to stand much longer against the turbulent radicalism of the street and the market-place, the moderate liberalism of a growing middle class, and the aristocratic liberalism of those Whigs who still held to the Foxite tradition. And, parallel with

these various liberal and radical currents, there was now arising a thought movement which supplied a theoretical basis for existing discontents. A solitary and unpopular, but in the end an extremely influential thinker, was elaborating a secular state on the basis of a rationalist philosophy and of a fallacious simplification of human nature. Bentham was at last coming into his own. He had been for many years, and in many volumes, undertaking a philosophical enquiry into man and the State, and had already evolved his famous formulæ: "The greatest happiness of the greatest number," "Each man to count for one and no more than one." His immense and systematic industry was surveying in their light the existing jungle of inherited and absurd customs, institutions and beliefs, and planning a new and salubrious city on the site thereof. This city would surely arise as soon as men could be brought to understand and adopt certain plain principles, *e.g.* that institutions must be judged by their utility and by that alone; that human motives were rooted in self-interest, which it was the task of education and legislation to render an enlightened self-interest; that each man's enlightened self-interest, working through a very wide franchise, would result in the creation of a government whose interests, unlike those of a governing aristocracy, would be in harmony with those of the majority of the people; that there would then be nothing to fear from State action. The body of thought which came a little later on to be known as Utilitarianism had grown gradually, and was to grow further under the influence of many minds;

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Bentham was, by 1820, becoming the centre of a regular school of jurists, publicists and economists. In other spheres than that of commerce the Benthamites favoured an increasing measure of State control, the creation of a centralised and bureaucratic administrative system; but questions of this kind were not then pressing. It was on the reform of the House of Commons that they concentrated their energies first of all; in a universal or a very wide suffrage they found a panacea for most of the ills of the country; and, a very important matter in view of long-cherished traditions as to the nature of representative government, they favoured the "delegate" theory of parliamentary representation. However, the "Philosophic Radicals," as the small but influential body of Bentham's immediate disciples came to be called, were by no means revolutionaries in practice; students, thinkers and social investigators, they held themselves ostentatiously aloof from the rabble.

Meanwhile, they continued to flash a cold and clear searchlight on many rotten patches in the old fabric of Church and State—on its criminal code, its prisons, its schools or lack of them, its local government. Their services to the cause of rational civilisation were considerable; full justice has now been done them by posterity, and M. Halévy. But the dislike which the Utilitarians aroused in most Tories and many Whigs of their own time was by no means entirely due to the self-preserving instincts of a narrow governing class; it went wider and deeper. Religious men were shocked by their profound secularity; cultivated men were repelled by their pedantry; thinkers of a



different cast found plenty to quarrel with in their fundamental assumptions; practical men were irritated by the impracticability of the extremists, their disregard of human nature in general and English human nature in particular. Lamb, for example, saw no reason to suppose that, if the people at large obtained more direct control over Parliament, everything would come right; or that the ascription of all the ills of the country to the existence of a "selfish and privileged aristocracy" was a sufficiently thorough diagnosis. A student of history, and of Burke, he was repelled by a school of thought which made up for a complete neglect of the past by an overweening dogmatism as to the future; he could not believe that human nature was compounded of the few and simple elements recognised by the Utilitarians, that sentiment and imagination could be banished from human affairs, that the art of government could safely assume that men were, or were soon likely to become, reasonable beings. None the less, while their formal and underlying doctrines as to human nature and the State were one thing, some of their practical proposals for legal, institutional and economic reform were quite another. These were dictated by common-sense and backed by knowledge; and it was in the middle classes, who were chafing under aristocratic domination, that they were to find their most congenial soil. The Benthamites' time had not yet come, but it was coming, and they were to leave a decisive mark on legislation which, in one decade, transformed eighteenth-century into nineteenth-century England.

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However, it would have been a bold man who, in 1820, could have prophesied 1830. The early years of George IV, down to 1826, were prosperous years. Economic questions replaced political questions in the public interest; the Catholic claims and parliamentary reform receded into the background; the working classes for the time being concentrated on the possibilities of Trade Unionism rather than on those of universal suffrage. The Tory Government, under the influence of the great statesman who succeeded Castlereagh at the Foreign Office in 1822, assumed a more liberal complexion. Huskisson, introduced by Canning into the Government, began a commercial policy which went some considerable way towards Free Trade. Peel continued the work of Romilly in reforming the criminal law; Brougham began his legal reforms; the relaxation of the statutes against working men's combinations in 1825 marked the beginning of modern Trade Unionism. The Whigs were still in eclipse: no one bothered about parliamentary reform, and they seemed to have no platform.

Lamb himself, with a few others, had meanwhile received the chief political stimulus of his life. He came out as an avowed follower of the man who was to be the first of three great nineteenth-century statesmen to understand the art of inspiring fresh life into a Conservative party. Up to the time when he would not be denied the real leadership of the Tories, Canning's variegated and adventurous career had witnessed to the discontent of genius with Whigs and Tories alike, and a reputation for intrigue had earned him the dislike and

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distrust of many of the chief statesmen of the time. He had now conquered all obstacles by sheer brain power, and by his perception of the needs and spirit of the age. Realising that England had become a great commercial nation, he could, although himself no expert in commercial and financial matters, listen to those who were. In foreign politics, his official sphere, he succeeded, by an adroit diplomacy and with hardly the threat of war, in raising England to be the arbiter of Europe, and in identifying her decisively with the cause of Nationality against the reactionary powers of the Holy Alliance. To Canning's type of liberal conservatism Lamb remained faithful in essentials all his life. Canning was not a Whig; nevertheless, as Lord John Russell once remarked, Liberal Conservative says in seven syllables what Whig says in one.

We know that Lamb's abilities had impressed the few who mattered, including Canning, and that they prophesied a future for him if he would only bestir himself. Otherwise he had made no mark; he was far too reflective to be a fluent orator, and the fact that he could not say what he thought of the intelligence of the average member in the unparliamentary language which he affected in private life must have cramped his style. In 1825 steps had to be taken to find him what was thought to be a safe seat for his own county town of Hertford. But a well-known Radical of the day, Thomas Duncombe, took the field. Lamb was accordingly compelled for once in his life to undergo the experiences incidental to a really exciting contested election in those days, and he did not

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like them. Duncombe, an eccentric man of fashion, had carried his electioneering generosity so far as to run himself into debt, and had to lie *perdu* during the polling days, until he found himself protected from the sheriff's officers by privilege of Parliament. Lamb's opponents made play with the misfortunes of his private life; one particularly virulent leaflet was signed "Glenarvon."

He retired from the contest in disgust, and resumed an amiable and ornamental mode of life with which parliamentary duties would not in any case have seriously interfered. At home, things remained much as they had been. Lady Melbourne had died, game to the last we may be sure, in 1818; Lady Caroline was now mistress of Brompton Hall. A strange mistress she was for that stately house. Her husband, though he subsequently showed himself capable of assuming responsibility for the internal condition of the country during a critical period, could do nothing with a neurotic woman. "Cherubina has been outdoing herself in absurdity," wrote Lady Cowper to Frederick Lamb in 1819, "she will really make William the laughing-stock of the country. . . . William all the time miserable, fretted to death, flying into passions continually, and letting her have quite her own way."

Visitors who were privileged to enter her own particular apartment were astonished. The curtains were full of holes; an "elegant crucifix" and an altar-cloth figured prominently; some of Dibdin's drawings, a Prayer Book, a bottle of lavender water, and, in her later days unfortunately, a flask of cognac, jostled one another on the centre

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table; pieces of plum cake, of pickled salmon and other materials for casual refreshment pointed to irregular attendance at meals; the walls were adorned by portraits of her husband and of Byron, and by a sketch representing "Death snatching her Lost Children from her arms." Being fond of riding barebacked and "at frantic speed" about the park, she had a fall in 1819, followed by a "nervous fever." She then wrote to Godwin, of whom more anon, "that a new Lady Caroline had arisen from the ashes of the old, as from the fifteenth of this month"; but, as our informant remarks, the new Lady Caroline turned out to be most uncommonly like the old: when we next hear of her, it is as going to Astley's to teach riding to the youth who figured as champion at George IV's coronation. Caring nothing for rank or wealth, and being indeed, as her dearest friend Lady Morgan tells us, quite unable to conceive that a lady or gentleman could have less than several thousands a year, she valued her exalted relatives solely "for what they dare do and have done, and I fear nobody except the Devil, who certainly has all along been very particular in his attentions to me, and has sent me as many baits as Job." Holding these views, she gathered all manner of people round her, some of them very queer people. Among them was a musical composer called Nathan, whose claim to her notice seems to have been that he had set to music Byron's *Hebrew Melodies*. To him she sent some remarkable verses of her own composition beginning—

"Oh, I adore thee, William Lamb,  
But hate to hear thee say 'God damn.'"



LADY CAROLINE LAMB

*(From an engraving by W. Finden from an original in the possession of Mr. John Murray.)*



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She also wrote two more novels: her husband was moved to write to John Murray about one of them, suggesting that he might try his hand on improving it.

But, maddening though Lady Caroline could be and frequently was, she had her reasonable intervals. She then showed all the wit and the charm which had always made her unlike anyone else, and had won his own heart long years before. He still could not bear to put her away.

When he turned from his wife to his son, he found no consolation there. The poor boy's real condition must have become only too evident by the time that he was approaching his fourteenth year. But his father seems to have refused to recognise that he was more than backward. A Dr. Lee, who has left some reminiscences of the family, was engaged to live with him as a tutor; and there is something pathetic in the way in which we find Lamb insisting that, whatever else the boy is taught, he must have a sound classical education on the accepted lines. But Lady Caroline, with more perception, had recourse to what would now be called psycho-analysis, in the person of William Godwin.

Lamb and Lady Caroline had had some previous knowledge of that peculiar philosopher; he had read *Political Justice* without thinking much of it; but its mad logic had not shocked him, as it would probably have shocked a Victorian successor of his. Godwin's ministrations to the unhappy boy proved of course quite useless; but Lady Caroline wrote to him about her soul in a manner that it would be an under-statement to



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call unreserved. The Lambs now found, as Shelley had found before them, that it was very difficult to enjoy the sage's personal acquaintance for long without the question presenting itself of financial help to philosophy in distress. Lady Caroline's contribution to its necessities took the strange form of a diamond ring which had been given her by Byron, and a bottle of otto of roses which had belonged to Ali Pasha; in 1823 we find, and it is a pleasant association, the names of William Lamb and Charles Lamb among others subscribed to an appeal for assistance.<sup>1</sup> Lamb himself rather liked Godwin, having a tolerance for oddity, and sympathising perhaps with one whose matrimonial experiences had been variegated. Later on, when in power, he intervened to prevent the abolition of the old man's post of Yeoman of the Exchequer.

We have another glimpse of Lamb and his wife about this time; Edward Bulwer (Lord Lytton) was their neighbour in Hertfordshire. He had known and corresponded with Lady Caroline as a school-boy, and, early in 1824, presented himself, grown up and far gone in Byronism, at Bocket Hall. "Her manners, her thought and her character," he writes, "shifted their colours as rapidly as those of a chameleon. She has sent her page the round of her guests at three o'clock in the morning with a message that she was playing the organ that stood in the staircase at Bocket, and begged the favour of the company to hear. Strange to say, it was a summons generally obeyed, and those who obeyed it did not regret

<sup>1</sup>See Kegan Paul, *Life of Godwin*, II. 283.

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the loss of their sleep; for, when the audience had assembled, she soon relinquished the solemn keys of the organ, and her talk would be so brilliant and animated that the dawn found one still listening, spellbound, without a thought of bed."

Lady Caroline made herself extremely agreeable to her young guest, who at once succumbed. But, after a brief spell of happiness, in which he was permitted to enjoy the belief that he was the only person who really understood her, he found himself supplanted by a subsequent arrival, an even more taking young man. Lady Caroline had now the exquisite satisfaction of being addressed as follows; "Farewell for ever, it is over. Now I see you in your true light. Vain and heartless, you have only trifled with my feelings in order to betray me. I despise, as well as leave you; instead of jealousy I feel only contempt. Farewell, go and be happy." This, which we have from Bulwer himself in a letter to a friend, is interesting as showing what a young man could do in those days. But he also has something which is more relevant to our purpose; "Lamb, by the bye, was particularly kind to me; I think he saw my feelings. He is a singularly fine character for a man of the world."

It would have been unkind to have grudged Lady Caroline what amusement she could still get in the lighter ways of the god at whose hands she had suffered so much. The final crisis of her fate was approaching; it was still to be linked with that of the man whom, twelve years before, she had so gaily and so ignorantly challenged. It was eight years since Byron had left England; she had heard little of him since; the mark which he

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had made on her life seemed to have been somewhat blurred by time and distance. But Eros had not, even now, finished his sport with his victim. One night in March 1824, being then ill, she had a dream of extraordinary vividness, which she related to her husband and others at the time. Byron stood before her in ghastly fashion, appearing "fatter than when I knew him, and not near so handsome." He died in April; news of his death reached England in the middle of May. It was kept from her for a little time; when she was told she collapsed utterly. The first day on which she could go out in an open carriage was on July 12th; her husband, who was luckily riding on ahead of her, met a funeral procession on the road near Bocket Hall. On enquiring whose it was, he was told that it was Byron's, and that it was to rest that night at Welwyn on its way north. He managed to keep the news of this grim coincidence from his wife for the moment;<sup>1</sup> when she came to hear of it, as she did in a very few hours, she fell gravely ill again. The finishing stroke was subsequently put by the publication of Medwin's *Conversations with Lord Byron*. There she found the noble poet represented as speaking of herself in his most blackguardly vein; she also found, printed for the first time, the lines "Remember thee!"—some of the most venomous that can ever have been addressed by a man to a woman.

It was now all over with Lady Caroline. But her husband, his sister tells us, was still unable to make up his mind one way or the other; no doubt,

<sup>1</sup>See Lady Caroline's letter to Medwin in Prothero's edition of the *Byron Correspondence*, II. 451 seq.

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in the end, it was made up for him. A legal separation was at long last arranged, and Lamb was "immensely relieved." Lady Caroline protested pathetically. "They have broken my heart," she wrote, "not my spirit, and if I will but sign a paper, all my rich relations will protect me, and I shall no doubt go with an Almack's ticket to Heaven." Lamb betook himself to London, while she continued to live with old Lord Melbourne and her son at Brompton Hall. An awful household it must have been; Lamb, in spite of the separation, was there from time to time. The surveillance which her condition necessitated was managed, so far as permitted, with every delicacy of precaution; her husband, who was fortunately becoming absorbed in politics, kept in touch with her by letters written as though nothing had occurred between them. Over the details of her final degeneration we may draw a veil; she took to laudanum and brandy. Her mind became clearer in her last days; she expressed the deepest regard for her husband, and remorse for the wrongs that she had inflicted upon him. Her husband replied in terms of affection and forgiveness.<sup>1</sup> He hurried over from Dublin Castle, where he then was, to be with her at the end, and, as her brother wrote, "felt and acted as I knew he would." Lady Caroline died, aged only forty-two, on January 26th, 1828, and was buried in Hatfield Church.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See letter in *Torrens*, p. 192.

<sup>2</sup>A very generous obituary notice of Lady Caroline, which appeared in the *Literary Gazette*, 1828, pp. 107 seq., has been attributed to Lamb, but it is not in his style, and was almost certainly written by Bulwer Lytton.

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Lamb always said to the end of his life that, in spite of everything, she was more to him than any woman ever had been, or ever would be.

He now became devoted to his unhappy son, whose condition he was so unwilling to discuss that his sister did not like to speak to him on the subject. Augustus Lamb never improved; as a grown man he still showed the mind and behaviour of a child of nine. His state necessitated constant watchfulness; Mrs. Norton tells us how she often saw his father drop whatever he happened to be doing at the moment, in order to make sure that he was not being neglected by his attendant. He lingered on for eight years after his mother's death, dying in 1836, at the age of twenty-nine. The manner of his death may be given in his father's own words. "Augustus was lying on a sofa near me; he had been reading, but I thought had dropped asleep. Suddenly he said to me in a quiet and reflective tone, 'I wish you would give me some franks, that I may write and thank people who have been kind in their enquiries.' The pen dropped from my hand as if I had been struck, for the words and the manner were as clear and thoughtful as if no cloud had ever hung heavily over him. I cannot give any notion of what I felt; for I believed it to be, as it proved, the summons they call the lightning before death. In a few hours he was gone."

We left Lamb, politically speaking, at a dead end for the second time in his career, and he was forty-eight. But events and a man were now to combine to thrust him forward. In February 1827 Lord Liverpool was disabled by a paralytic

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stroke. The next three years were to witness the dissolution, amid a general blur of party divisions, of the old Tory party, which had won the war and utterly exhausted its mission. Canning's hour had come at last, and he was borne into power by an irresistible public demand. But he had incurred the bitter enmity of many of the Tories by his support of the Catholic claims; and Wellington, Peel and Eldon refused to stay in the Government. Canning had accordingly to have recourse to the Whigs. Most of the orthodox Whigs also refused to have anything to do with him; Grey, their leader, made a bitter attack on him in the House of Lords, and averred in private his opinion that the son of an actress was *de facto* incapacitated from becoming Prime Minister of England. But he was joined by Palmerston—not yet a very important man; by Lamb—still less important; and by Huskisson—the most important of the three, but soon to perish in the first railway accident. Whether Canning would have been able to maintain a new Tory party and so perhaps have changed the course of English history during the next decade we shall never know, for he was a dying man.

Lamb was now brought into the House of Commons again (May 1827) and appointed Chief Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. The office was not regarded as being of the first rank, and was strictly subordinate to the English Home Office. Nevertheless, it was a post of importance and difficulty; Lamb now, and for the first time in his life, had a definite job to do, and from this time his career as a statesman begins.

## CHAPTER IV

### *IRELAND*

Over against the conventional and moderate English statesmen with whom we have so far been concerned there loomed, from the other side of St. George's Channel, the figure of Daniel O'Connell. To the service of Ireland he had brought a devotion which, if no more intense than that of others before and since, was exercised in a larger fashion, through a greater number of years, and to a more effective result. Gifted with an eloquence which could with an equal sureness touch the springs of laughter and of tears, and, in its command over the emotions of large masses of men, has never been surpassed; gifted with an organising faculty not inferior to his eloquence; able to excite and, far more remarkably, to control the Irish people with a sway that no one has since asserted, he was, in 1827, approaching the zenith of his career. Resenting, with a patriotism at once religious and national, the conditions under which the Union had been brought to pass, but realising, from ineffaceable memories of his youth, that the last hope of armed resistance had been buried in the graves of Fitzgerald and Emmet, he had lavished the united powers of an orator, a lawyer and a man of affairs on welding his Catholic fellow-countrymen into a political force, and had founded the most widespread, the most

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tenacious and the least turbulent peasant association ever known. What had English statesmen to say to one whose genius had been nurtured, not on the familiar compromises of their own political life, or on the sober debates of their own Parliament, but on the passions of far more primitive assemblies—whose path had lain, not along the high-road of a relatively advanced social order, but amid the elemental hopes and needs of a people of the soil?—the answer to this question is surely written for our learning. Meanwhile, he was watching, with a keen and mistrustful eye, every party move at Westminster, awaiting what was by now the certain fulfilment of the first of the two great purposes of his life.

O'Connell, and he alone, still breathes something of the breath of life into a story of which the details are dreary and perplexed beyond words, that of the relations between England and Ireland during most of the first half of the nineteenth century. It is one portion of a longer history, which is no doubt in its essence the history of a struggle, carried on through many years and in many phases, between a Catholic and a Protestant civilisation. But this feature had long been overlaid by others which were so important that they cannot be called secondary. Of the material woes from which Ireland suffered during our period, and beyond it, the root cause lay in the fact that the people had outgrown the land; the population of the island in 1831 was not far short of double what it is now. But the agrarian question, submerged as it was under a welter of political and ecclesiastical controversy, was not then recognised in its true light. We need do no



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more than allude to the evils of the Irish land system of those days, and their historical causes; landlords divided by race and religion from their tenants, often absentee, and leaving their estates in the hands of middlemen; holdings absurdly small; a miserable standard of life among the peasantry, who were always liable to eviction at pleasure. But, dire as was the poverty of many of them, it admitted of one or two very slight mitigations. They were all in the same boat, and were not exasperated by the juxtaposition of a prosperous middle class. With their resident landlords, indeed, they were often on the best of terms. They would have regarded it as highly unbecoming if any of their masters had adopted their own religion; and their genial beggary could forgive almost anything to hard-riding, hard-drinking and free-handed gentry.

To diagnose, and to mitigate by direct action, a diseased social and economic condition was hardly within the scope of the statesmanship of the early part of the nineteenth century; it was on the political issues that attention was focussed. The Catholics had the parliamentary franchise indeed—even to the “forty-shilling freeholders,” whom it was to the political interest of the landlords to multiply. But they were excluded from Parliament by the operation of an oath which no Catholic could take; they were also excluded from various public posts. Left to itself, the House of Commons would have conceded the Catholic claims before this time, but the Crown was against it, and the Lords were against it. The average Englishman knew the Irish only as immigrants who flocked over to undersell English

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labour, and he had only one sentiment towards Ireland, a desire to leave her alone. Repeal of the Union was not to be thought of; it was far too dangerous. Nor—and there was much to be said for this point of view—had the Union been anything but a perfectly fair and even favourable bargain for Ireland as regards her finances and her commerce; that it had not been accompanied—as Pitt had intended it should be—by admission of Catholics to Parliament, payment of the priests and Commutation of the Tithes, he preferred to forget. In any case, he saw no reason why more should be done for Papists who had, a generation before, rebelled and invited the French over; if they had to pay tithes, so did he; nor, in the years succeeding Waterloo, did it appear that the Irish peasants had a monopoly of hunger and misery. The best thing they could do, it seemed, was to learn civic virtue, and cease behaving in a way which rendered Coercion Acts the only means of governing them. And, indeed, to strike some sort of equitable balance between the wrongs and the crimes of the Irish people might have puzzled him, as it has since puzzled others.

If the civil institutions of Ireland testified to the original relationship of a conquering and a conquered people, its ecclesiastical arrangements did so even more. The Irish Established Church was a main bulwark of the Protestant Ascendancy; it is important to remember that it was not a distinct Church in theory or in fact, but was the Irish branch of the "United Church of England and Ireland." Four archbishoprics and eighteen bishoprics, all wealthy, provided for divines who

were not up to the corresponding English standard, and governed a Church which ministered to about a sixth of the population. The Catholic peasants were taxed for its support, though not so universally or so severely as is sometimes made out; from about 1830 they took to refusing to pay tithe; and the question of how to obtain it, and in the meanwhile to support the Protestant clergy, was to consume an amount of official and parliamentary time that beggars description. Astonishing as this Church was in itself, its reactions on English affairs during our period were destined to be more astonishing still. It obviously had to be reformed, and it underwent a moderate reorganisation at the hands of the Government in 1833. But this mild application of the secular arm to a professedly spiritual institution aroused the wrath of Oxford and of the Tractarians; and, by an irony of events which dizzies our reflection, it was the Irish Church that provided the occasion, though not the cause, of the chief religious movement which occurred in nineteenth-century England. And other matters touching its finances were to embitter English politics for years. The question of whether some of its revenues could be diverted to "general purposes of education" by state action was to be adopted as a touchstone of Liberal *versus* Conservative policy, to come up, in various ways, in session after session of Parliament, to cripple one government and to upset another. "Which of the ancient philosophers was it," said Lamb in a letter to Wellesley on this subject, "who, upon some deep metaphysical question being proposed to him by some king, first asked for a day, then for a week, then for a year,

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and at the end of that period declared his inability to reply at all?"

But we are anticipating; Lamb arrived just on the close of what had been an interim period in the relations of the two countries. The restrictions on Irish trade had been abolished. A policy which aimed, by means of the Penal Laws and the Charter Schools, at the forcible Anglicisation of the Irish people had also been long abandoned; a policy which was to give the Catholics their due weight in the affairs of the country, and to reform its institutions on the English model, had not yet been begun. The outstanding question at the moment was that of the wonderful organisation which O'Connell had founded with the immediate object of securing Emancipation. The Catholic Association bore indeed no resemblance to the various secret societies which were perpetually springing up among the peasants—societies which represented a rudimentary sort of agricultural Trade Unionism, but employed as their more usual weapons intimidation, robbery and murder. None the less, controlled from Dublin, officered by priests, and penetrating everywhere, it was not likely to have been tolerated by the English Government at that time and in that country. But O'Connell, a practised lawyer, had easily circumvented an Act of Parliament passed for the purpose of suppressing it, and was to show the greatest ingenuity in maintaining the same thing under other forms. Between the Catholic Association and the Orange Lodges of the north there lay the potentialities of civil war; however, except for some spasmodic agrarian disorder, things were tolerably quiet in 1827. O'Connell, aware

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that Lamb had been sent over from England to pave the way for Emancipation, regarded him with a benevolent eye.

Lamb, however, had little as yet directly to do with the man with whom his Government was to be so uncomfortably allied later on; his business lay in Dublin Castle, and with the details of one of the most depressing systems of administration ever devised by man. At its head in 1827 stood the Marquess Wellesley, Lord Lieutenant. "You have heard of Lord Wellesley's death? A very agreeable man, so long as he had his own way"—the Duke of Wellington made the remark to a portrait painter, who was mildly surprised to see His Grace punctual to his appointment for a sitting the morning after his brother's death, as though nothing had happened. An old man now, with a fine record of service behind him as Governor-General of India, Wellesley was ill at ease in Ireland, and wished to leave. Arbitrary, querulous, soured by the fact that he had attained no higher rank in the peerage than that of an Irish Marquess, he was not the easiest of chiefs. The Government displayed an embarrassing tendency to consult Lamb direct; he had to remonstrate against this. Later on he was to come into violent collision with Wellesley, but no man could have been more loyal to him as a subordinate.

The Dublin Castle officials were in the position of a garrison in a hostile country. We may hear Lamb's official biographer on this point, who knew the circumstances well. "Peel," says Torrens, "had encircled the departments with an arctic zone of distrust; Goulburn was the centre of a mere fog."

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Lamb had long since taken refuge from a complaint that was originally perhaps something like Peel's in a manner that was by no means formal. He made himself popular at once. Everyone who came to see him was admitted, and only informers were shown the door. A visitor was met with advice, suitably graduated in expression, not to go too fast, not to ask for impossibilities, and not to do anything damned foolish. The grandson of one of his subordinates told the late Mr. G. W. E. Russell that he remembered, as a small boy, being taken into the Chief Secretary's room. Lamb genially asked him if he saw anything that he would like. The boy chose a large stick of sealing-wax. "That's right, my boy," said Lamb, pressing a bundle of pens into his hand, "begin life early. All these things belong to the public, and your business must always be to get out of the public as much as you can." It was certainly, as Mr. Russell remarks, the principle on which the "governing families" had generally acted.

He appears to have soon learned the ropes. Before he had been in Dublin two months we find a long official memorandum from his pen dealing with Jury Bills, Criminal Law, Tolls and Customs, the Magistracy, Tithes, Sheriffs, the possibilities, as to which he was not sanguine, of "mixed education" (*i.e.* Catholic and Protestant). He soon found out that, while everyone jobbed in those days, jobbery was a fine art in Dublin; that every post, from that of a door-keeper in the Four Courts to a bishopric, was supposed to go by favour; that newspapers were subsidised by the Government, and that his own correspondence was liable to be

opened in the post. He also learned something of the Irish peasants' attitude towards agrarian crime—an attitude derived from dim race-memories of an earlier age, before the advent of the Saxon, when the land was held in common by the tribe; he learned, in fact, as much about Ireland as an able man with exceptional opportunities could learn in six months. "I remember," wrote Lord John Russell to him some years later, "you were the first person in 1829 by whom I heard it said that Ireland would henceforth claim to be treated as a branch of the United Kingdom." This was hardly a correct diagnosis of her aspirations, as we know after a hundred years. But Lamb certainly saw that, if English rule was to be maintained in Ireland at all, it could only be maintained by conciliating the Catholics, as well as by enforcing the law as it stood without fear or favour. It must indeed be admitted that the real potentialities of the Irish people, the true inwardness of the national temperament, had not been revealed to the Whigs of that age. In their view, Ireland was an imperfectly civilised country, which needed, not indeed to be Anglicised on compulsion, but to be given the fullest possible opportunities of enjoying the influence and the benefits of a neighbouring and a more advanced civilisation.

In January 1828 Lamb was called home. Canning died after the very briefest tenure of office; Goderich, his successor, was too weak to keep things together; the King commissioned the Duke of Wellington to form a Government on a broad basis. Lamb, Palmerston, Huskisson and some others of Canning's immediate followers had formed

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a group of their own, small but "very respectable"; they were open to join any party with which they could come to terms. They now allied themselves with the Duke, a step which involved Lamb in the strange position, for him, of having to vote against the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts—the least creditable act of his political life. But it was not long before the Canningites resigned in a body in consequence of Huskisson's falling out with the Duke on a matter touching parliamentary reform. The King, anxious to retain Lamb, offered him Cabinet office, but he would not leave his friends, foreseeing, no doubt, where his future lay. His father had meanwhile died, and Melbourne, as we may at last call him, took his seat in the House of Lords in February 1829.

It was the eve of Catholic Emancipation. Ennis, the capital of Co. Clare, had been the theatre of a remarkable demonstration during the first few days of the preceding July. The Catholic O'Connell was standing for the county against a highly popular and respected Protestant landlord; crowds were bivouacking in the fields around the little town; the local gentry looked helplessly on as their own tenants, perfectly well behaved and miraculously sober, were marshalled by the priests to vote for O'Connell. He was elected, although he could not take his seat. But the fruits of his education of the Irish peasants were plain to see; what had been done in this case could be done in others; all but the blindest Tories might now have seen that the game was up. None the less, Protestantism did not yield without a struggle, nor did the King. Catholic Emancipation is ancient history now, and the



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principle involved has won universal recognition. But it was a burning question indeed at a time when hatred of Rome was a very real factor in English life. It stirred, as nothing had done for years, a consciousness of wide national issues in many a sleepy country town and village up and down the land, and thus preluded the great outburst of political activity which the following year was to inaugurate.

The Catholic claims were conceded from sheer necessity. But the situation seemed to Melbourne, and to many others, to demand certain measures of precaution. If the House of Commons could have had their way, and Melbourne voted for it in the Lords, the Irish priests would have been endowed by the State. O'Connell's Catholic Association was again prohibited, and—a step which O'Connell himself did not strongly oppose—the “forty-shilling freeholders” were disfranchised. But Emancipation was also accompanied by an act of extraordinary folly; O'Connell was made to submit himself for re-election. Meanwhile the die-hard Tories had rebelled; the Duke of Wellington made overtures to the Canningites, who could not see their way to rejoining him.

The question of parliamentary reform, which had practically lapsed for some years, now began to revive; O'Connell had provided an object lesson in the virtues of association. 1829 had been a bad year; and the prospects for 1830 seemed gloomy also. None the less, the demand for reform was not as yet widespread; various slight proposals in that direction which were introduced by some independent Tories at the beginning of 1830, as well as

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by the Whig Lord John Russell, aroused little interest. But towards the middle of the year there came a very sudden change. George IV died in June; one obstacle was thus removed from the path of reform; and a more important event followed, the Revolution of July. When news arrived that Charles X, after an ineffectual attempt to restrict the franchise and gag the Press, had abdicated, that an orderly and a bloodless revolution had been accomplished, and that a "citizen king" now reigned over the French, English opinion was stirred in a manner that disconcerted Tories and Whigs alike. For the second time within living memory England had received an electric shock from France, and it was reserved for 1830 to put a final end to a process which 1789 had begun.

A crisis was at hand; the Whigs' time had come at last. It would be a caricature of their attitude to compare it to that of the keeper of a dangerous beast which showed signs of breaking loose, even if there was something of this in it. The leaders certainly approached their task in the cautious spirit of a ruling class, convinced that government was the business of the order to which they themselves belonged. They were not in the least warmed by the spectacle of "a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks." They—and Melbourne among them—were realists, anchored on the English tradition of compromise, content to see the next practical step forward, and to take it. But, as their forbears had already shown in the course of English history, they could take the lead in an emergency. They had the sagacity to interpret, the statesman-

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ship to direct, the sentiments of those with whom they had chiefly to reckon, and never showed it more notably than in accomplishing the task for which the tutelary genius of the British Constitution had reserved them.

Political reform soon dwarfed every other question. Wellington declared against it in a speech which made many men Reformers for life. Organised, or partially organised, labour in the North assumed a menacing attitude; unorganised labour in the South broke into something very like insurrection. The Tories, having no mind to incur further odium, resigned; Grey was thereupon summoned by the new King to form a Government (November 1830). This he consented to do, provided that he were empowered to bring forward a measure of parliamentary reform. He offered terms to the Canningites, which were accepted, and Melbourne now found himself again, and finally, in the Whig camp.

Grey accordingly came in at the head of a majority, an only too large majority, consisting of all who were for various reasons discontented with Tory government, and including all who had, in various ways, felt the influence of Bentham and his school. There were aristocratic Whigs, middle-class Whigs, popular and agitating Radicals, Philosophic Radicals, and, a recent phenomenon at Westminster, Catholic Irish. For O'Connell was now bestriding the gulf between his own and the neighbouring island; though about equally suspicious of both the English parties, he naturally saw more business possibilities in the Whigs. The Government reflected the composite character of

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the party—so far as could have been expected from an eminently aristocratic body which comprised six of Grey's own relatives. It was far from homogeneous and comprised, indeed, several members who were not of the genuine Whig breed, and one Tory Duke (Richmond). In respect of individual ability and force, few more remarkable governments have ever taken office. Besides Grey, who was past his prime, and Melbourne, there were Stanley (Lord Derby), Brougham, Durham, Palmerston and, though not yet in the Cabinet, Lord John Russell. Strong and vivid in personnel, conscious of a definite mission, stimulated, if not exactly inspired, by the popular enthusiasm which had borne it to power after an almost continuous exile of half a century, the Whig Government of 1830 was a different affair altogether from its paler Victorian successors. But nearly all its members were utterly untried in office, and, since they were not really united in fundamental opinion, they were to prove before long a most difficult team to drive. One characteristic indeed they most of them had in common. Several, like Grey himself, were proud with a pride which was not that of men, but of Whig Peers; Brougham was proud with the pride of intellect; Palmerston's superb self-confidence was that of the practical man who despises theorists. As regards the most important offices, Melbourne, not as a first choice, became Home Secretary; Palmerston Foreign Secretary; Althorp Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Brougham Lord Chancellor. On three members of the Cabinet we must dwell for a moment.

Brougham's fame has grown dim by now. But,

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in his own day, he summed up more than any other Minister the forces which shattered the old Toryism and shaped the new age. Great motive powers, says the author of the *Apologia*, generally lie out of sight, but Cardinal Newman, when he wrote this, must have forgotten the arch-enemy of his younger days. Brougham was never out of sight during the first forty years of the nineteenth century. To the intelligent middle and artisan classes of that time he represented the "march of mind" incarnate; relying upon their support, this Scottish lawyer had been able to hold his own with the Whig aristocracy itself. The youngest of the original Edinburgh Reviewers; having won an immense parliamentary and forensic reputation twenty years before this time; possessed of an amazingly versatile and restless intellect which rendered him as nearly omniscient as a man can well be; conversant with history, philosophy, political economy and various branches of natural science; an effective pioneer of legal reform; a whole-hearted but not so successful pioneer of national education—his services to the cause of Liberalism had been immense. Vast intellectual enterprises simmered in his heated brain, including that of writing the *Novum Organum* of the nineteenth century. Melbourne had the highest estimate of his powers, and a wholesome respect for his oratory. Speaking in the House of Lords, he once characterised him by an allusion to Burke, whom Brougham had quoted. Burke "was a man of the greatest natural abilities, cultivated in a degree worthy of such gifts; but the noble and learned Lord (Brougham) should at the same time have remem-



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*(From a painting by James Lonsdale in the National Portrait Gallery.)*



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bered that Mr. Burke was a man of intensely violent passions; that he was a man as unmeasured in his invective as he was profuse in panegyric, that he disregarded the moral maxim of *ne quid nimis*—that such was the extreme recklessness, such the unqualified eccentricities of his conduct, that he often proved a most dangerous and pernicious guide.” The implied comparison was indeed unjust to Burke, though its terms were true enough as applied to Brougham. Nervously unstable, beginning to be erratic beyond belief, he eventually lost judgment and balance altogether, became impossible to work with, and left a splendid reputation to point one of the tritest of morals.

Lord Althorp was Brougham’s antithesis. A country gentleman, disliking London, hating the House of Commons, abominating office, slow in speech, slow in thought, but with plenty of common-sense; unable to conceive of anyone being tempted to do anything but the absolutely straight thing; very liberal in opinion; he also showed a humane zeal in taking up the cause of the factory children. As Chancellor of the Exchequer, indeed, he was not a brilliant success, but his services in carrying the Reform Bill were very great, and he was so universally respected that a Whig Government could hardly get on without him. But there is no need to elaborate a contrast; have we not read, in *Eminent Victorians*, the delineation of Mr. Gladstone and of Lord Hartington as respectively concerned in the fate of General Gordon? Brougham indeed had only some features in common with Gladstone, though they were prominent features, including a preternatural vitality, an



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immense amount of information, and an unlimited eloquence. But Lord Althorp, afterwards Earl Spencer, was the twin brother of Lord Hartington, afterwards Duke of Devonshire.

Lord Durham, of subsequent Canadian fame, provided another instance of great powers spoiled by temperamental faults; he was in any case among the most interesting men of the age. The head of one of the oldest and wealthiest families in the north of England, and a son-in-law of Grey, he was by conviction a Radical, his affection for the people being in proportion to the distance to which circumstances had removed him from them, and his faith in democracy being combined with a singularly autocratic temper. Politically, he derived from a few exponents of aristocratic radicalism who had emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century—such as the Duke of Richmond, who had, so far back as 1780, introduced into the House of Lords a Bill for manhood suffrage, annual parliaments and equal electoral districts; as the only Protestant Duke of Norfolk, who had openly toasted “our Sovereign’s health—the majesty of the people,” and been deprived of his lord-lieutenancy for doing so; as the Earl Stanhope who had presided over the club that had provoked Burke to his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, but was subsequently converted from advanced views by the elopement of his third daughter with the family apothecary. Durham’s irritable temper was no doubt caused partly by ill-health, and partly by some sad domestic bereavements; though, as regards his health, Melbourne unkindly remarked that he had never known him ill when anything

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required to be done that suited his views. Melbourne, in fact, though he did not fear Durham himself or anyone else, confessed to "fearing his character," as that of a dangerously ambitious man.<sup>1</sup> For the time being Durham, with Brougham, represented the extreme Left in Grey's Cabinet; he was one, and by far the most radical, of the committee of four who drafted the Reform Bill. But he subsequently resigned office in a huff, and went as ambassador to St. Petersburg.

At last then, and in his old age, Grey saw the purpose of his youth on the verge of fulfilment, a thorough though moderately conceived reform of the basis of parliamentary representation. Anything like yielding to Radical demands for a universal or a very wide franchise was abhorrent to him, as it was to most of his colleagues; it was the fixed belief of even so progressive a Whig as Macaulay that universal suffrage would inevitably lead to revolution. There was another question which was of equal or even greater importance in the eyes of the Radicals, the abolition of open voting in favour of the ballot; but most of the Whig leaders, including Melbourne, refused to countenance it at this time. They had no mind to weaken the influence of the landed classes more than was necessary, nor indeed was there by any means a strong general opinion in favour of secret voting. Many public-spirited people entertained a genuine prejudice against "sneaking up to the ballot box" instead of "saying openly and freely for whom you vote," as a free-born Englishman should; many less public-spirited people also entertained a genuine

<sup>1</sup>Hatherton, April 30th, 1838.

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prejudice against diminishing the market value of a commodity which they happened to possess. Grey's purpose was to enfranchise, in his own words, "trade and thrift"; the pristine glory of his party might then be expected to revive with the great Whig connection exercising a legitimate and beneficent influence over a middle-class electorate. Besides parliamentary reform, retrenchment of public expenditure, especially on places and pensions, was a main plank in the Whig platform; but, in view of the state of the country at the time, the first task of the new Government had to be, in the literal sense, to govern. Of this the immediate brunt had to be borne by Melbourne.

## CHAPTER V

### *THE HOME OFFICE*

Melbourne's hour had arrived; he had been appointed to the premier Secretaryship of State. His birth and connections, and also his membership of a small but influential parliamentary group whose support Grey wished to enlist, no doubt gave him a claim upon the Whigs according to contemporary standards. However, it seemed strange that he should have been selected for an office which, important in any case, assumed a special importance in view of the state of the country at the end of 1830. He was unknown to the general public, nor had his languid but perfectly well-bred figure impressed Parliament. He bore about him none of the outward and visible signs of an eminent statesman; his latent powers were recognised only by the few. The Home Office, moreover, was an exceptionally laborious Department as they went in those days, seeing that its administration extended to Ireland as well as to England. "Melbourne too lazy," wrote Greville at the moment, but the diarist candidly admits that he had reason to change his opinion almost at once. The shrewd Whig leaders had not make a mistake; a firm hand and a cool head made themselves felt at once. Melbourne's temperament at any rate served to protect him from the influences of hurry and excitement, from acting first and thinking afterwards;

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but, in truth, the circumstances of his life henceforth were to allow him scant opportunity for much more than the affectation of indolence. Like other people of his type he had reserves of energy on which to draw, and could show himself, on occasion, capable of the most prolonged exertion. Nor, though he doubted about many things, were his doubts of a kind to paralyse his powers of action when something clearly had to be done, and done quickly. On the other hand, when it was not so clear what, if anything, could be done, he recommended to the attention of his advisers one of his favourite maxims: "When in doubt what to do, do nothing."

His work during the momentous period of the Reform Bill lay mainly behind the scenes. He was the Minister primarily responsible for the internal condition of a country which seemed on divers occasions to be on the verge of revolution. On him fell the main responsibility of securing that the great change in parliamentary representation which was demanded by the majority of the nation should be accomplished by normal and constitutional means, and that the legislature should be preserved from the appearance as well as the reality of being overawed by external force. He was necessarily concerned with some repressive measures which are bound to appear harsh now that standards in such matters have changed. He was also concerned—to some extent at least—with some urgent social problems incidental to a rapidly expanding society; with the first groping efforts of the State to mitigate the urban barbarism which the Industrial Revolution had engendered; with the early strivings of

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organised labour—with a sphere, in fact, in which the paradox of to-day is apt to become the platitude of the day after to-morrow. Altogether, it was not a task of a kind to gain him much posthumous credit. And, especially, a statesman who is charged with the duty of enforcing the law at a time of social unrest is almost as certain to be abused by the majority of a subsequent generation as he is to be approved by the majority of his own.

It is interesting to observe, in this last connection, the change which has come over opinion as regards the agricultural riots of 1830, a change which has been proportionate to our growth in humane feeling, and, as must be added, to the distance of the particular historian from the events with which the authorities of that day were confronted. Roebuck, a contemporary of those events and a severe critic of the Whigs, approves the proceedings of the Special Commission appointed to try the rioters. So does, by implication, Harriet Martineau, who knew all about the labourers, and, in her *History of the Peace*, takes occasion to contrast what she considered Lord Ashley's officious zeal on behalf of the Lancashire operatives with his indifference to the labourers on his father's estate. But they were both Philosophic Radicals, and, if there was one man more than another who was given to "ravishing the poor when he getteth him into his net," it was a Philosophic Radical of that age. For another contemporary view, and from one who was by no means a Philosophic Radical, we may go to Macaulay. "I did," he told the House of Commons, "attribute the Kentish riots, the Hampshire riots, the burning of corn-stacks,

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the destruction of threshing machines, to the obstinacy with which the Ministers of the Crown had refused to listen to the demands of the people. But did I ever say that the rioters ought not to be imprisoned, that the incendiaries ought not to be hanged?"<sup>1</sup> Spencer Walpole, writing his *History of England* in the 'seventies, states that "the proceedings of the Special Commission had relieved the southern counties from a reign of terror which had no parallel in recent English history." Quite lately, and with reference to the same incidents; "the chief shame," write Mr. and Mrs. J. L. Hammonds, "attaches to Melbourne," who "let the judges do their worst."<sup>2</sup> "Melbourne," says Professor G. M. Trevelyan, "was allowed to stain the reputation of the Whigs by cruelties which history, now that she knows the facts, can pardon as little as Peterloo."<sup>3</sup> In these circumstances, a biographer of Melbourne may be pardoned if he endeavours to tell the outlines of the story with some reference to the point of view of those upon whom there rested at the time the responsibility of preserving public order. In any case, it is a miserable story enough.

The new Home Secretary was faced with a crisis at once. Large portions of the south of England were in a state bordering on insurrection. Life indeed was not attacked, though those who tried to defend their property were sometimes knocked about; but arson, robbery and machine-breaking

<sup>1</sup>*Speech on the Union with Ireland* (February 6th, 1833).

<sup>2</sup>*The Village Labourer*, p. 290. Mr. and Mrs. Hammonds were the first historians to investigate and to describe fully "The last Labourers' Revolt," and I am greatly indebted to their vivid and moving account.

<sup>3</sup>*Lord Grey of the Reform Bill*, p. 252.

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were epidemic. The character and extent of the outbreaks, which were primarily directed to securing higher wages, varied in different districts. They appear to have begun in Kent before the news of the July revolution reached England, but that they were enormously stimulated by that event, and that the rioters used the catchwords of French Jacobinism, is certain. From Kent the riots spread to Sussex, Hampshire, Berkshire, Wiltshire and Surrey and so onwards until sixteen counties were more or less affected. The farmers denied that they could pay higher wages unless taxation and tithes were substantially reduced or abolished; the *Times*, however, took a different view. That journal had every reason to believe that "in innumerable cases" the clergy had remitted their tithes, and the farmers had pocketed the difference.<sup>1</sup>

Much dire poverty there was indeed, and had been for long. The hardships from which the labourers suffered no doubt varied according to the district; but their existence was fully recognised by the authorities. In some districts the labourers' position won such sympathy as to hinder the enlistment of special constables; sometimes, again, the farmers made common cause with them. But that it was a time of exceptional distress, that 1830 was an exceptionally bad year, is a suggestion that was strenuously denied by responsible people at the time, and finds no support from recent enquiry.<sup>2</sup> Nor indeed, does it appear that the labourers themselves claimed that they were worse off than they had been for some years. It was France that made

<sup>1</sup>*Times*, January 17th, 1831.

<sup>2</sup>See Butler, *Passing of the Great Reform Bill*, p. 119 seq.



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the difference—wild rumours of a great and sudden change in that country which had abolished riches, poverty and social distinctions. Pathetic hopes of what might be expected from political change, hatred of the tithes and of the parson-magistrate, the indirect effect of the language used by the middle-class political unions, the direct effect of inflammatory propaganda, all contributed. Besides the leaflets which circulated in the country districts, Cobbett's weekly paper employed the wildest language, attacked the clergy and the tithes with especial ferocity, attributed the condition of the labourers solely to the Government, and, if it did not instigate, it approved<sup>1</sup> the incendiarism.

It is difficult for us to realise the terror which brooded over every house that had anything to lose throughout many a lonely country district during the autumn and winter months of 1830. "The farmers," says Harriet Martineau, "had no rest day or night; even while they were patrolling their farms a stack, probably treated with oil beforehand, would suddenly blaze up." The experiences of one quiet Wiltshire vicarage, typical no doubt of those of hundreds of other homes—"the ceaseless alarms at every unexpected noise, or delay, or interruption"—have been recorded by Augustus Hare, who, speaking for his own district, denied that there was any scarcity to account for the prevalent state of things.<sup>2</sup> "The riots in Surrey become alarming," wrote Sir John (Lord) Camp-

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett, *Weekly Political Register*, Vol. 71, pp. 937-8.

<sup>2</sup>As regards Wiltshire there are also the remarks of the *Times* reporter contrasting the Wilts. with the Hants. prisoners: see too Hill, *Toryism and the People*, p. 210.

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bell. "Mrs. Robert Scarlett and her children have been obliged to fly from Abinger; the country round Dorking is all in a state of insurrection." Towards the end of the year the movement became widespread in two of the most disturbed counties; bands of men roamed the country destroying buildings and demanding money with menaces. In Hampshire they marched 1600 strong; in Wiltshire a regular battle took place between the rioters and the local yeomanry.

Melbourne took prompt measures. Acting in concert with the War Office he hurried troops to the worst districts. He issued circulars reminding the magistrates that they must administer the law stringently, that they must not—as some of them had done—yield to intimidation, and that they had no power to fix rates of wages. Meanwhile, a flood of letters had been pouring into the Home Office, some containing alarming reports of various degrees of authenticity, others recommending the adoption of all manner of desirable and undesirable expedients. We are glad to see Melbourne absolutely refusing to countenance the employment of an *agent provocateur*; he read, indeed, a lecture to the man who had suggested it on the danger of employing "spies and accomplices," with an allusion to 1817 and the infamous Oliver.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 131. The remarks as to Home Office espionage in Hill, *op. cit.* 120 and n., must not, Mr. Hill kindly tells me, be taken as indicating anything as to Melbourne's personal attitude. The H. O. letter referred to by Mr. Hill (H. O. 41/12, March 22, 1834) is the only one of many in that volume that refers to anything of the kind: it contains an offer to pay any expenses incurred by the G. O. C. Northern district in "obtaining information" as to a disturbed area.

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The Cabinet appointed a Special Commission to try the rioters; what else they could have been expected to do in the circumstances is hard to see. It was a terrible errand on which the judges had to proceed, and Melbourne advised them to omit the customary hospitality to the grand juries and magistrates. They sat at Winchester, Salisbury, Dorchester, Reading, Abingdon and Aylesbury; beginning at Winchester. The Duke of Wellington and other Hampshire gentlemen sat with the judges as assessors; though they did not interfere in the conduct of the cases, they doubtless came in when it was a question of sentences; and the Duke, we may surmise, was not disposed to leniency. The judges, in their charges, pointed out that they were there to administer the law and not to enquire into grievances; and the law that they had to administer was Draconian. Statutes provided that if destruction of buildings were accomplished in the course of a riot, it should be punishable by death; if otherwise, by transportation for seven or by imprisonment for not exceeding four years. The destruction of agricultural machinery in similar circumstances was punishable by seven years' transportation or by imprisonment for not more than two years. Arson was a capital offence; it excited a special detestation as an "un-English" form of crime, and one supposed, though erroneously, to have been due to the incitement of French agents.

Such was the law. The Crown Counsel at Winchester and the other places were no doubt eager to secure convictions. The judges probably resembled the judge who tried the election rioters in *Felix Holt*—"he had no severe intention; it was

merely that he saw with severity." None the less, they appear to have acted throughout in the spirit of an admonition addressed by one of them to Counsel at Reading. "I beg you to understand," said Mr. Justice Park, "that every prisoner who cannot afford to employ Counsel is my client, and be assured that I shall not be so negligent of their interests as to allow you or anyone else to hang one of my clients to save your own." Nor does the diary kept by another of the judges, Mr. Justice Alderson, breathe the spirit of Judge Jeffreys. He was struck by the extent to which sheer ruffianism had contributed to the disturbances. But he was also deeply moved at having to sentence ignorant men who, he was sure, could have been trusted with his purse, if left alone. "I find the papers," he writes, "are beginning to talk of our severity at Winchester. I wish we could get rid of the responsibility altogether, but, reviewing our judgments, I still have no misgivings as to our having come to a right conclusion. Those who don't know all the facts, and all the doubts, and all the deliberations can hardly judge with accuracy on such points. It is, however, very pardonable in them to err on the side of mercy, however embarrassing it may be." We have already seen what was the nature of the penalties prescribed for riotously destroying property, for demanding money with menaces, and for the robbery of even small sums from the person. That the judges strained the law in any way against the accused, that they did not take all pains to distinguish between degrees of guilt, or neglected the juries' recommendations to mercy, has never been suggested, and is amply disproved by the reports.

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On the contrary, they consulted together most anxiously, and made careful enquiry into the previous history and circumstances of the accused. They were convinced—and it is a point of some importance—that the worst offenders were not in general starving labourers. “I state publicly,” said Baron Vaughan, for example, at Winchester, “that in the course of these trials we have found very few instances (I am not certain I can lay my finger on one) in which the piercing spur of necessity has compelled the offenders to the commission of the offences; they are in general persons of a different character and description. We find among them carpenters, blacksmiths, sawyers, and others whose wages are admitted to be adequate to their wants.

. . . The labourers, the poor industrious labourers, were not the leaders, though they admittedly swelled the numbers of the mobs.”<sup>1</sup> This distinction the judges appear, wherever possible, to have applied. In Berkshire, for example, one of them gave it to be understood that the comparative lightness of the sentences was due not only to the nature of the offences, but to the fact that the offenders were in general not “handicraft” men but labourers.<sup>2</sup>

The business came to an end at last. The sentences were generally deferred until the Commission had concluded its sittings at the particular place, and the final scenes which occurred in the Court House of one country town after another left—as indeed they were meant to leave—an indelible impression on all who witnessed them. The prisoners were brought up in batches—fifteen or twenty at once—to hear their fate. The ring leaders

<sup>1</sup>*Times*, January 1st, 1831.

<sup>2</sup>*Times*, January 7th, 1831.

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of violent or destructive mobs, those found guilty of aggravated robbery, or those who had been previously convicted got, and probably expected, no mercy. First came those on whom the law required the death sentence to be passed; they were, in several of the towns, horribly numerous, but the vast majority were given to understand that they would not in fact be executed, but be transported. Next came those who were sentenced to various terms of transportation: last, those sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, some quite short. The agony of some of the married men sentenced to transportation upset judges and spectators alike; they were advised in some cases to petition the Home Office for permission to take their families with them; we may hope that it was granted at any rate to some of them. By others, doubtless the unmarried, the prospect of being sent to agricultural work in "Van Diemen's land" seems to have been viewed with comparative equanimity; what they had feared was being sent to "the Bermudas." After all, for the young men without dependents—and many of them were very young—transportation was probably better in the long run than the inside of an English prison. From first to last, and throughout the numerous counties affected, three men were hanged for other offences than arson; between four and five hundred men were sentenced to transportation; and about four hundred men were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment.<sup>1</sup> As regards the incendiary

<sup>1</sup>At Winchester, out of about 300 in the calendar, 67 were acquitted, 65 sentenced to various terms of imprisonment, 36 to transportation, while 101 received capital sentences, all

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journalists, Carlile was sentenced to a fine and imprisonment; Cobbett most undeservedly escaped.

Melbourne, of course, had nothing to do with the sentences inflicted by the judges; his concern lay with the petitions for reprieve. As regards the death sentences, he gave the petitioners, as everyone agreed, a patient and courteous hearing, and respited the majority of those who had been left for execution. Cases of this kind were, of course, just those in which a man of Melbourne's type would have been exceedingly scrupulous. He made a point, we are told, of personally examining with great care every case involving a death sentence, even when there was no doubt; on one occasion, Lord Chief Justice Tenterden was with him four or five hours over a murder case. But he was always, as he said in another connection, against meddling with sentences except for very cogent reasons; such a course was always more or less of a censure on the judge or the magistrate. As he now told the House of Commons, through his brother, he was not disposed to interfere with these sentences at the time, though many of the transportation sentences were, with his concurrence, reduced sub-

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but six commuted to transportation; of these six most were afterwards reprieved. 110 men were charged with riotous assembly and destruction of buildings and machinery; some *e.g.* had headed mobs of 1000 and 300 for the purpose of destroying two poor-houses; but in one case they were acquitted on this count as it was not proved that they had intended to demolish the whole of the building. Among other charges, there were some of demanding money with menaces, sending threatening letters, compelling parsons and farmers to sign agreements for reduction of tithes and wages respectively.

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sequently. No Home Secretary, we may presume, then or now, could have weakened the administration of justice by advising an immediate and wholesale application of the prerogative of mercy. Even if Melbourne had been inclined to do so, which he was not, he would have had to reckon not only with the King, but with Parliament. When the question of a general amnesty was raised in the House of Commons by "Orator" Hunt, it was rejected by 269 votes to 2.

The censure which has been so recently and freely lavished on Melbourne, as on other statesmen of the time, for the harshness with which the "Last Labourers' Revolt" was suppressed, is, in truth, beside the mark. They were no more callous than any other men called upon to perform a stern public duty; the character of the laws, and the manner in which they were applied, were the normal result of normal causes. Savage laws are nearly always the product of inadequate means of detecting crime and capturing criminals; improvements had indeed been made by 1830, but what appears to us a reasonable scale of penalties had still to await the full organisation of a police force.<sup>1</sup> There were even then no police in the rural districts; how utterly inadequate indeed local arrangements were in this respect is revealed by the history of these riots. The severe application of the existing laws was likewise the result of a feeling of general insecurity. We of to-day have come to realise how tough the social fabric really is, but the men of 1830 had not our experience; and, at this time in par-

<sup>1</sup>See Miss A. A. W. Ramsay in *Quarterly Review*, No. 399, p. 40 and note.



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ticular, society seemed to those in authority to be particularly liable to attack. The Whig leaders had reasons for their alarm, over and above the inbred hatred of even appearing to yield to violence which had led Melbourne himself to vote for the Six Acts. The number of troops available had, since the peace, been reduced to the very low figure of eleven thousand men. The capital seemed to be surrounded by a ring of insurgent country<sup>1</sup> in a manner that recalled the Paris of 1789, and Melbourne and his colleagues were convinced that they had to deal, not merely or mainly with hunger riots, but with something that was very like actual sedition. The disorder was certainly put down without much difficulty, but they were determined that it should not recur; nor did it. Rick-burning broke out again in the following year, but nothing like the previous widespread outbreaks took place. Nor were the statesmen of 1830 unaware that mere repression would not suffice, inadequate as their remedial measures necessarily seem to-day. Melbourne subsequently gave sympathetic consideration to proposals for state-aided land purchase, but nothing came of them, and such proposals were in truth beyond the practical politics of that age. It was in a reform of the Poor Law that the Government conceived the chief remedy to lie—a reform which was to concern itself, among other things,

<sup>1</sup>The riots do not appear to have been widely organised; none the less, nearly all the crimes dealt with by the Special Commission in Hants., Wilts., Dorset, Berks. and Bucks. occurred during the last week or ten days of November. There was also a good deal of trouble in Surrey and Sussex about the same time.

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with the distribution of the population, to amend the law of "settlement," and to provide for the transference of surplus labour from South to North.

The southern riots were thus suppressed. In the North and Midlands the problem of securing the unembarrassed action of the legislature was closely involved with that presented by the growth of a truculent Trade Unionism. The right to collective bargaining as to wages and hours had, thanks largely to Francis Place, been recently legalised; on the sporadic violence, the sporadic repression, the outrages and the sacrifices of this phase of the Trade Union movement we cannot now dwell. It was new and strange then. To Melbourne and to many others of that age the prospect of permanently raising wages by collective bargaining seemed economically impossible, and the proceedings of the Unions appeared to be perpetually on the verge of illegal conspiracy. And indeed, while we remember the conditions from which Trade Unionism did in fact rescue Labour, it is only fair to the statesmen of that age not to forget the crimes by which its earlier progress was accompanied.

It so happened that Melbourne had not been at the Home Office more than a few weeks before the barbarous murder of a Lancashire mill-owner named Ashton, in connection with an industrial dispute, aroused the greatest indignation, and other incidents of violence compelled his attention. The circumstances of the time naturally endowed the Unions with the gravest political potentialities; though distinct from, they were in touch with political unions whose aims were avowedly subversive of the established order; and Melbourne

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regarded them as "the most formidable difficulty and danger with which the Government had to contend." Pressed from many sources, including the King, to do something decisive against the Unions, he appointed a Commission to report. But he found himself unable to act on the Commissioners' drastic recommendations against them. He could not "propose measures which would have been a serious infringement upon the Constitution and liberties of the country, and to which it would have been impossible to have obtained the consent of Parliament."

During these arduous duties Melbourne was not sustained by much belief in the Reform Bill itself. It does not appear what he thought of the most powerful criticism of the Bill urged by its opponents, *i.e.* that its effect was to substitute, for a "diversified franchise," an arrangement which would divide the country mechanically, and on a property basis, into an enfranchised and a disfranchised class. He had no objection to the rotten boroughs; he regarded them, indeed, as a useful element in the old system. Some fragmentary jottings in his papers show an acute intellect, given to over-refinement when not confronted with an actual situation, brooding over the general question. He feared deterioration in the personnel of the House of Commons; and, hating the "delegate" theory of representation on which the Radicals insisted, he also feared that it might lose its genuinely representative character. Another of his doubts is curious, and conceived from quite the opposite direction; he seems to have anticipated that a House of Commons elected "on theory and

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principle" would exhibit a jealousy of other channels of opinion which would be fatal to freedom of speech in the country as a whole. But what chiefly weighed with him was the spectacle of the extravagant hopes which the Bill inspired, especially among the poor and ignorant—the pathetic confidence that, when once it became law, manna would rain from Heaven. Cobbett, for example, had promptly abandoned anti-clerical agitation and a threatened exposure of the proceedings of the Special Commission, and was enraptured with the new prospect. "We shall," he wrote, "once more see the labouring man with meat and bread, with a bed to lie in, and a linen shirt and a Sunday coat to wear. This, my friends, is what I have in view more than any other consequence of this great measure."<sup>1</sup> *Common Sense*, again, a twopenny paper designed for circulation among the working classes, informed its readers that the Revolution of July was "the greatest moral miracle which had been exhibited since the creation of the world."<sup>2</sup> To Melbourne's cool and detached intelligence a species of frenzy seemed to have seized hold on large masses of the population; he feared the inevitable disillusionment. And, if one idea always seemed more absurd to him than another, it was to build high hopes on any merely political change.

He was not himself a great deal concerned with the actual framing of the Bill and its conduct through Parliament. At one stage, as was bound to have happened, a middle course was suggested, designed to save the dignity of the Peers while

<sup>1</sup>Cobbett, *Register*, Vol. 71, p. 714.

<sup>2</sup>Issue of November 20th, 1830.

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making some concessions to the reformers. Between the Waverers, as they were called, and other sections of the House of Lords, Greville constituted himself the intermediary, and Greville was, according to Disraeli, "the most conceited man I ever met, though I have read Cicero, and known Bulwer Lytton." Of Melbourne, Greville could make nothing at all, and confided to his diary the gravest doubts as to the Home Secretary. Melbourne, as we may perceive from the unconscious testimony of the diarist himself, took Greville's measure thoroughly. When, in the course of comings and goings which were invested with an air of mysterious trepidation, Greville called at the Home Office, Melbourne would baffle him now with a "lazy listening humour," now with ironical exaggerations, and now with a pessimism that was by no means wholly ironical. He was not unnaturally anxious to avert the necessity of creating Peers to pass the Bill. But that he ever had much faith in the Waverers is improbable; his intellectual processes were always unhampered by his personal inclinations. He had said from the first that, if the thing had to be done at all, it must be done thoroughly. "I am for a low figure," he said during the preliminary consultations; "unless we have a large basis to work on we shall do nothing."<sup>1</sup> For the same reason he was strongly opposed to any attempt at creating a large number of plural voters, as incompatible with the essence of the proposed scheme.<sup>2</sup> This was characteristic; whenever Melbourne

<sup>1</sup>Torrens, p. 235, doubtless on the authority of Lord Lansdowne.

<sup>2</sup>*Papers*, p. 135.

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yielded, he yielded outright. Deep-seated anomalies of this kind—such appears to have been his train of thought—may work very well so long as they are not seriously challenged. Otherwise, they will not bear tinkering with, and must go.

Years afterwards he had occasion to recall in Parliament the position that he had adopted towards the Reform Bill. "I delivered," he said, "a speech on the Reform Bill which was censured at the time as not very friendly or decisive towards the measure I advocated. I then made two statements for my own vindication, and to guard against future misconception. . . . One was, that unquestionably the measure would fail to answer some of those anticipations then held regarding it; that it would not produce any of the advantages to which the parties to whom I allude then looked forward; that it would not introduce great changes into the face of society, that it would not do away with bribery and corruption."

When, in October 1831, the second edition of the Reform Bill was before the House of Lords, there were many more eloquent speeches than Melbourne's; but none blunter, franker and more to the point. He had always been against Reform, but he made his *volte-face* openly, and with no nonsense about sacrificing principles. The popular demand, he told the Lords, was simply irresistible, and for their Lordships to attempt to resist it would be madness. As regards the other great constitutional change that had recently been effected, whose obstinacy was it that had given O'Connell his weapon? Let them take warning by that example. "I implore your Lordships," he concluded, "not to

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be guilty of the rashness of fear; I implore you not to be guilty of the greater rashness of delay."

But the Lords were guilty of both, and everyone knows what followed their rejection of the Bill. Incendiarism broke out again in the southern counties; the Castle at Nottingham was burnt down; hell was let loose at Bristol. A few days later it was reported, erroneously as it turned out, that a hundred thousand men were marching on London. Melbourne did not affect to conceal his alarm, especially in view of the inadequate number of troops available. As regards the defence of the capital, he arranged for a body of troops to be kept in readiness and out of sight. But he had also taken precautions in other directions, and especially by the appointment of an unconventional private secretary. This was a man who, as he justly considered, would be more useful in some respects than the "fine gentlemen clerks" in the Home Office.

Mr. Thomas Young is said to have been originally a purser on the Duke of Devonshire's yacht, and to have been subsequently engaged in some species of journalism; at any rate he had, like Mr. Guppy, "been brought up in a sharp school, and acquired a great knowledge of general practice." Melbourne had come across him somewhere and marked him down for his own. Young soon became on familiar terms with the London Radicals and with their chief, Francis Place. Melbourne himself had known Place of old, as a person of great electioneering influence in the important and democratic constituency of Westminster; he had also been in the habit of wearing breeches of the Radical tailor's creation. He had previously,

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through his brother George, urged Place to address some words of wisdom to the agricultural rioters, but Place had not been willing to interfere with anything that seemed likely to accelerate Reform. However, Melbourne had continued to keep in touch, through his brother and his private secretary, with the famous establishment, half library half political club, at Charing Cross. Place now perceived quite clearly that violence and bloodshed would compromise the prospects of a Bill which had agreeably surprised him by its thoroughgoing character, and was convinced that the working classes without the middle classes would be helpless to promote it. The middle classes had organised themselves. Scenes similar to those at Bristol might have occurred, for example, at Birmingham, but for the presence there of an organised political union, under Attwood, which was strong enough to keep order. None the less, its existence was embarrassing enough to the Government; it amounted, as Melbourne said, "to a conspiracy to supersede and assume the powers of the State." The metropolis, meanwhile, was following the example of Birmingham, but the situation there was complicated by the existence side by side of two rival political unions, the one moderate and statesmanlike, the other so impossible in its demands as to alienate the saner working men. The "National Union of the Working Classes" had developed out of the "Metropolitan Trades Union" and desired to upset the Reform Bill altogether as insufficiently democratic; the "National Political Union," a middle-class body, had been formed to support King, Constitu-



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tion and Bill; and, altogether, London seemed in danger of becoming a hive of revolutionary sections after the best Parisian model. When the more moderate organisation of the two showed an embarrassing inclination to assist the Government by arming itself, the language which Melbourne habitually employed must have taken on an added strength. But he was suavity and common-sense incarnate in a letter (October 27th, 1831) which he addressed to the Radical Sir Francis Burdett, who had consented to be Chairman of that Union.

"First," he says, "the formation of any such body [*i.e.* an armed body] would be entirely illegal and unconstitutional. . . . Every subject of these realms has a right to the possession of arms for his defence; but to form military bodies, to muster, to array, to arm, and to train them, except by direction and under the control of the sovereign authority, is clearly contrary to law, and entirely inconsistent with the continuance of legal government in the country.

"Secondly, although considerable ferment prevails and a great disposition to violence and plunder exists amongst certain classes of the community, there does not appear to me to be so great a degree of danger as to justify the training to arms of all those who may be desirous of preventing tumult and protecting property. If it is inexpedient to train and exercise them, it is also inexpedient to arm them, because arms, placed in untrained hands, only produce accidental, unintended and unnecessary bloodshed.

"Thirdly, if any extraordinary measures are required, the law and the Constitution clearly

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point out what they should be. It is unnecessary to have recourse to establishments with new and foreign names, or to any other weapons than the constable's staff. If the inhabitants of any division of the metropolis, or of the metropolis at large, feel apprehensive of disturbance and danger, let them come forward and be sworn in as special constables; and in that case there is a power in the magistrates to form and arrange them in such a manner as may render them effectual for other objects, and even to arm them with more formidable weapons, if such should appear to be necessary.<sup>1</sup>

Alarmist rumours spread; the working class Union assumed a complexion which the Law Officers regarded as definitely seditious, and Melbourne took action. Troops were openly posted about London. Proclamations were issued forbidding, in effect, either Union to meet, and calling upon every loyal citizen to assist in preserving order. Quiet was thus restored.

But when the third edition of the Reform Bill was mutilated by the House of Lords (May 8th, 1832), when it was known that Grey had resigned and that Wellington was endeavouring to form a Government, the situation seemed desperate. It was now a straight fight between the people and the Lords. There was no violence, but a spirit of determination. Place coined his historic slogan: "To stop the Duke, go for gold"; but a run on the Bank of England was only one of the measures contemplated by the Reformers. The National Political Union above referred to, with which the more

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 138.

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radical members of the Government appear to have been in touch, prepared to assume control of the country. The historian of the Peninsular War, who had radical leanings, was to have been offered the command at Birmingham; as regards London, the Reformers intended to create just enough agitation there to prevent the despatch of troops elsewhere. Their plans were well known to Young, who doubtless communicated them to Melbourne. But it would have been better if he had refrained from discussing them in a familiar and even facetious letter addressed to Colonel Napier, or at any rate had refrained from writing from the Home Office and under Melbourne's frank; the letter was bound to have come out eventually. "Thank God," Young piously concluded, "we have been spared the trial, but, as a matter of speculation, tell me what you think would have been the result. Am I right in my conjecture that you would have refused the Birmingham invite (*sic*) and kept your sword in its scabbard?" Napier would probably have done so; he was not inclined, as he put it, "to co-operate in arms with a Birmingham attorney and a London tailor<sup>1</sup> against the Duke of Wellington." None the less, it is an interesting subject of speculation what might have happened if pressure on the King, and through him on the House of Lords, had not been in the end sufficient to secure the passing of the Reform Bill.

But the sequel of a measure designed solely in the interest of the middle classes, and abolishing such instances of a more democratic franchise as had previously existed, was naturally destined to dis-

<sup>1</sup>*I.e.* Parkes and Place.

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appoint the working classes. "If the people do not get their bellyful after this, I shall be torn in pieces," said Attwood to Melbourne, directly after the Bill was passed. "And so much the better, you deserve it," Melbourne retorted. The disillusioning process which he had foreseen began apace, and was eventually to develop into Chartism. The Trade Unions became, for the time being, increasingly diverted from their legitimate functions by the crude and intoxicating attractions of Owenite socialism. In particular, the enormous though short-lived "Grand National Consolidated Trades Union" began to spread from North to South. An organisation which proclaimed as its "great and ultimate object" to bring about "A DIFFERENT ORDER OF THINGS, in which the really useful and intelligent part of society only shall have the direction of its affairs, in which well-directed industry and virtue shall meet their just distinction and reward, and vicious idleness its merited contempt and destitution," could hardly have been regarded with complete equanimity by any Government in 1834. Melbourne was again pressed to take drastic action against the Unions, and again he replied to his frightened correspondents, who included the King, "that unions for the purpose of raising (or lowering) wages were perfectly legal, unless accompanied by illegal acts."

He was, however, determined that the law should be enforced against any who brought themselves within its scope, and the famous six Dorset labourers were unfortunate enough to do so. Among the illegal practices to which the Trade Union leaders of that day were addicted was that

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of imposing oaths of secrecy upon the members.<sup>1</sup> It was very generally considered at the time that the practice led to a great deal of violence and undue intimidation, and prevented evidence being given in courts of law. Nevertheless, the sentence of seven years' transportation inflicted upon these unhappy men for merely administering unlawful oaths of this character strikes us as barbarous. And—a matter which differentiates their case from that of the 1830 rioters—the judge's conduct of the trial, though not the legality of the sentence, was called in question. But, though subjected to the strongest possible pressure, Melbourne and the Cabinet were inexorable. Though he agreed later that all but two might come back before they had served their term, and the other two pardoned provided that they remained in the Colony, he refused to interfere at the time with a sentence that had been inflicted in due course of law.

This matter provoked one of the best known incidents in the history of Trade Unionism. From daybreak on the 21st April, 1834, crowds, variously estimated at from twenty-five to thirty thousand, began to assemble near what is now King's Cross Station. The arrangements which Melbourne made were long remembered in his Department as having been admirable. He had warned the magistrates to be on the alert and to enrol special constables; as regards the troops, he had insisted that they should be strictly confined to barracks, though kept

<sup>1</sup>"The Tolpuddle Unionists, with their secret oaths, were suspected of bringing into a tranquil, if distressed, countryside the dreaded war of classes which had already convulsed the factory towns," Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

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under arms. The procession, accordingly, found no representatives of authority to fight with, and nothing to oppose its progress to Whitehall. Melbourne took care to show himself; the manner indeed in which he "looked philosophically from a window of the Home Office at the thirty thousand Unionists who came to intimidate him, and some few, as he was aware, with the intention of taking his life," extorted the admiration of his severe critic, Harriet Martineau. He sent out to say that, if the petition were presented on another day, and in another manner, he would himself lay it before the King, but he would not receive "a demonstration of physical force meant to overawe the Government." The crowd quietly dispersed.

Meanwhile, and since the passing of the Reform Bill, Grey's Government had, in two years, achieved a legislative record which stands by itself in English history. They had passed measures for abolishing slavery in the British Empire; for reorganising the Poor Law from top to bottom; for reforming the Irish Church; for abolishing, in effect, the East India Company as a trading corporation; for assigning a small government grant towards building schools; and for limiting the employment of children in factories—measures infinitely contentious in those days, and hostile to various vested interests. In their factory legislation, Melbourne, stimulated no doubt by Althorp and his own incongruous nephew, Lord Ashley (Lord Shaftesbury), appears to have taken an active part. One of the best known, and best authenticated, stories that cluster round his name concerns the education clauses of the first effective Factory Act—clauses

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which came to nothing. Mr. Evelyn Denison (afterwards Lord Ossington) stopped him at the door of the Home Office to urge certain amendments. Melbourne bade him speak to his brother George. "I have been with him," Denison complained, "for half an hour, but can make no way; he damned me, damned the clauses, and damned the Bill." "And damn it all," replied Melbourne gravely, "what more could he say? But I'll see about it"—a story which is sometimes quoted without the last words. Melbourne refused to yield to the clamour of the manufacturers, who sent numerous deputations to the Home Office prophesying ruin; when they claimed that previous enquiries had been biassed, and obtained the appointment of a Royal Commission, he insisted on its reporting very speedily, and sanctioned the preparation of the necessary legislation in advance.<sup>1</sup>

By the middle of 1834 the Ministry of Grey was nearing its end. The great measure on which they were all more or less united had been passed. Inherent divergencies were now breaking out, and Grey was not the man to reconcile them. Ireland was taking an ever-increasing revenge on England for the Union, and Irish problems, interminable and insoluble, were settling like an incubus on Westminster. Catholic Emancipation had satisfied neither O'Connell nor the Irish. "When the right thing was done," Melbourne used to say, "it was done so tardily and insincerely as to falsify every reasonable anticipation and to realise every evil

<sup>1</sup>Torrens, who was in touch with the Home Office during these years, says, p. 271, that Melbourne had some difficulty in persuading the Cabinet to sanction the Bill.

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augury. What all the wise men promised has not happened, and what all the damned fools said would happen has come to pass." Grey's Government had indeed, and with difficulty, applied a measure of internal reform to the Irish Church; it had also done something for elementary education. Otherwise it had done nothing to benefit the mass of the Irish people. Its appointments were still almost exclusively of a Protestant complexion, for all that Catholic Emancipation had been passed. Tithe disturbances became chronic; many Protestant clergy were in great distress, and the Government had to advance money. Urged thereto by the fiery eloquence of Stanley, the Chief Secretary, the Government had passed a Coercion Act—or, as it should be more justly and correctly termed, a Peace Preservation Act—of unprecedented severity. But when it was proposed to secularise some of the revenues of the Church, a serious split in the Cabinet occurred; the extreme Right, consisting of Stanley and three others, resigned on the question. O'Connell meanwhile was passionately denouncing the "base, brutal and bloody Whigs"; he also brought forward a motion for the Repeal of the Union, which was hopelessly defeated. Not long afterwards the Grey Government ended, and in a singularly unimpressive manner; it floundered into another Irish bog, and could not get out again without leaving some important members behind. The reader may be spared the details of an imbroglio in which O'Connell, Wellesley, the Chief Secretary E. J. Littleton (Lord Hatherton) and Brougham all played confused and recriminatory parts; they may be found in any of the longer



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histories of the period. A scene in the House was followed by resignations. Althorp—"the tortoise on which the world reposed," as Melbourne called him—resigned; Grey, deprived of his chief lieutenant, was only too glad to take the opportunity of retiring finally from public life. After announcing the fact to the Cabinet, he handed a sealed letter to Melbourne. It was from the King, requiring "Viscount Melbourne's immediate attendance and advice on the existing state of affairs" (July 8th, 1834).

This invitation, though it surprised the general public, surprised none of the inner circle. Melbourne had acquitted himself admirably in a difficult post; he had won everyone's confidence, and he was very popular personally—the one man, Durham said, "of whom none of us could be jealous." Having ascertained that Lord Lansdowne, a Whig grandee of the heaviest calibre and the social chief of the party, did not wish to be head of the Government, and having stipulated that, if he became Prime Minister, Althorp should return as leader of the House of Commons, Melbourne accepted the office. It could hardly have taken him altogether by surprise; he must have seen the way things were going before this time. But he appears to have been particularly careful to dissemble any eagerness that he may have felt in the matter, if there is any truth in an anecdote which a member of the Government told Greville.<sup>1</sup> "He thought it," he told Young, "a damned bore, and

<sup>1</sup>This story was doubted, on the grounds of intrinsic improbability by Hayward, and it is not indeed reported at first hand.

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he was in many minds as to what he should do, be Minister or no." "Why, damn it all," replied his secretary, "such a position never was occupied by any Greek or Roman, and, if it only lasts two months, it is well worth while to have been Prime Minister of England." "By God, that's true," said Melbourne, "I'll go." What his private thoughts were we do not know. But it is significant that one of the last entries in his Commonplace Book, of about 1833, takes the form of a note to Voltaire's lines in the *Henriade*:

"Mais Henri s'avavançait vers sa grandeur suprême  
Par des chemins cachés, inconnus à lui-même:"

"The case with every great man. Much of what is attributed to design, accident; an unknown cause leading to an unknown end."

Melbourne's first tenure of office lasted a little longer than two months—just on four months, in fact—and he did not find it a bed of roses. First of all he had to begin what was destined to be a long series of encounters with William IV, than whom there have been worse kings, but none more undignified. An honourable and kindly man at bottom, in intelligence, though certainly in no other respect, he compared unfavourably with his predecessor. "William IV liked Melbourne," says Melbourne's official biographer, "because, as the King used to say, he was a great gentleman." On this Hayward comments: "Melbourne was a gentleman in the highest sense of the term, but he was not what is commonly called a great gentleman; he had not the air or the manners of a *grand seigneur*. William IV never liked him, and the words placed in the

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Sailor King's mouth are utterly unlike what 'he used to say.' " We can well believe it; William IV had an imperfect command of an admiral's temper; he also had some lingering prejudice against Melbourne, derived from old days and from George III, who had hated Melbourne House nearly as much as Carlton House. But he certainly disliked Melbourne less than any other possible candidate for the office of Prime Minister, and he had highly approved of his conduct at the Home Office.

Melbourne, on his side, had not the least wish to enjoy the intimacy of William IV; he had his share of a corporate and traditional pride which was at least equal to that of the occupant of the Throne. He desired indeed that the policy of the Government should receive the official and ostensible support of the Crown; otherwise he was not disposed to mitigate by any personal advances the healthy atmosphere of mutual distrust which was the normal condition of things as between a Whig statesman and his Sovereign. William IV began by making an amiable and futile suggestion that a government should be composed of "the respectable elements of all parties," and asked him to form a coalition with Peel; Viscount Melbourne, with the utmost politeness, did not see his way. The King then put a number of questions to his new Prime Minister, and in a manner that showed an attempt to dictate. Melbourne replied by a communication in which a disesteem for the King's intelligence, and an impatience with his manœuvring, are just perceptible beneath the formal homage of a Minister tendering advice to his Sovereign, and the firm tone of one Power addressing another.

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His Majesty had asked, among other things, whether he could feel secure against the introduction into the Government of those whose principles he dreaded and deprecated? Viscount Melbourne, in reply, hoped that he would not be called upon to do anything disagreeable to His Majesty. But he would be greatly wanting in his duty to His Majesty if he did not humbly represent that nothing appeared to him so impolitic and dangerous (omitting other objections) as the adoption of a principle of this kind. Viscount Melbourne had no intention at present of suggesting the introduction into His Majesty's Councils of any others than those he had already named to His Majesty, but he trusted that His Majesty would allow him to reserve to himself the power of recommending to His Majesty at any future time any one of His Majesty's subjects who was qualified by law to fully serve His Majesty.

Having dealt with his Sovereign, the new Prime Minister found his colleagues more difficult. First, the Lord Chancellor was breaking all bounds. Brougham told his friends that it was he who had made Melbourne Prime Minister, and his behaviour, which Melbourne intensely resented, showed his own belief in this supposition. Among other enormities, he laid a Bill on the table of the House of Lords, which involved a change in the judicial functions of that chamber, without consulting his colleagues. He then endeavoured to restore a waning popularity by a campaign in the country of his birth. Far from giving an overwrought brain any rest during the summer recess, he embarked on his once notorious tour through Scotland, and made a series of speeches of which the

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egotism and indiscretion passed belief. The King, as soon as he heard what was going on, exhibited apoplectic symptoms and sent for the Prime Minister. Lord Brougham was, among other things, taking the Great Seal about with him in a post-chaise, an act perilously near High Treason, what was Lord Melbourne going to do about it? It does not appear whether or not His Majesty knew that the Lord Chancellor was credibly reported to have engaged in a game of hide-and-seek with that symbol of Royal authority in an Edinburgh drawing-room; in any case Melbourne had his work cut out to put a decent face on Brougham's proceedings to his justly incensed Sovereign.

Then Lord Lansdowne nearly resigned from the Cabinet because the names of two friends of his, whom he wished to place on the Irish Poor Law Commission, had been, by pure inadvertence, omitted from the warrant of appointment, and there was some technical difficulty in drawing up another. Melbourne apologised profusely, soothed the great man by consulting him as to the bestowal of the next vacant Garter, and managed to put matters straight. An angry correspondence also broke out between Lord Durham and Lord John Russell about some incident that had occurred in the preparation of the Reform Bill, and the latter, without consulting Melbourne, asked leave of the King to relate in Parliament what had happened at a meeting of a committee of the Cabinet. To crown all, Lord Althorp's father died, and the indispensable leader of the House of Commons found himself compelled to undergo an involuntary ascension to the House of Lords.

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The agitations, the expectations, the hurrying to and fro occasioned by Lord Spencer's death and its consequences have been described by our greatest political diarist, and, far more vividly, by our only political novelist. We read in *Coningsby* of how the Tory guests assembled at the "Palladian palace of Beaumanoir" had, the evening before, been placidly discussing party prospects, and the respective electioneering potentialities of the Church and the Malt Tax. They had been especially struck by the creditable and surprising moderation of the Wesleyans as regards the Establishment; Lord Fitzbooby had, indeed, recently heard that the Wesleyans really were a respectable body of men, that their tenets did not differ materially from those of the Church of England, and that they were by no means to be confounded with the mass of the Dissenters. But the next morning, when the Duke came in late for breakfast and with news, "a thunderbolt from a summer sky," as Sir William Temple says, 'could not have produced a greater sensation.' The business of the repast ceased in a moment. The knives and forks were suddenly silent. All was still." Mr. Tadpole said it was an immense event; Mr. Taper did not see his way; Mr. Rigby produced reasons which convinced him that Lord Spencer was not really dead.

But he was; and the immense event proved a blessing in disguise to Melbourne, whom a brief experience of the joys of supreme power had left somewhat depressed. He doubted whether the Government could go on. Althorp's removal from the Commons now gave him the opportunity of intimating to the King that, while he was prepared

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to carry on, he was equally prepared to resign; he proposed to come down and discuss the matter at Brighton, where the King then was. The circumstances of an interview which was to prove of some constitutional importance were not particularly impressive, if we may believe stories that were all over London in a few days. Melbourne was ushered into the Presence, and sought to introduce the matter in hand. But the King was indisposed for business, and anticipated the historic remark addressed by the Governor of South Carolina to the Governor of North Carolina. Dinner, suggested His Majesty, was not far off, and politics could wait; meanwhile, talking was dry work, and the appropriate alternative was at hand. During dinner, the King regaled his guest with anecdotes of his naval career; the Prime Minister listened with apparent pleasure; for, if the anecdotes were tedious, the wine was not. When dessert was at length reached, and Melbourne showed signs of making a request; "By the way," said His Majesty abruptly, "Lord Althorp's [*sic*] dead, I hear—so is the Government, of course; where the head's dead the body can't go on at all; therefore there's no help for it, you must all resign. Here, My Lord," he added, "here's a letter I've written to the Duke of Wellington, directing him to form a Cabinet. Be sure you give it him directly you arrive in town."

But of course, as the documents show, a good deal more was said than this, either that evening or the following morning. Melbourne appears to have left the question of whether he should resign or not entirely to the King's decision; nowadays it would not be permissible for a Prime Minister to take that

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course; he would be expected to tender definite advice one way or the other. The historical significance of the episode lies, indeed, in the fact that "Melbourne and the King unconsciously helped to elucidate a doctrine of the Constitution which, previously indeterminate, was determined once for all by the transactions of 1834."<sup>1</sup> The King disliked some important items of the Government programme, and disliked especially the idea that "that young man" Lord John Russell should lead the House of Commons. He conceived, not altogether unreasonably, that the country might have changed its mind about the Whigs, and Melbourne no doubt agreed. He accordingly decided to dismiss the Ministry; but Melbourne took care, a matter for which the King was very grateful, that a colourable pretext was supplied. The situation was, however, ambiguous in itself, and especially bound to appear so to the nation. Melbourne, both in public and in private, was most careful to disclaim any opinion that the King had acted in an unconstitutional or even an injudicious manner. But the King subsequently claimed the dismissal of his Ministers as his own personal act, thus putting a weapon into the hands of the Whigs.<sup>2</sup> It was, in fact, the last occasion on which a Sovereign has himself dismissed a Ministry.

<sup>1</sup>J. R. Thurston, *Peel*, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup>Primary authorities, *Papers*, p. 219 seq.; *Stockmar*, I. 329 seq. M. Halévy's statement (*History*, III. 179) that Melbourne deliberately plotted to get himself dismissed rather than resign goes beyond the evidence. From the papers it looks as if Melbourne rather expected to be asked to stay in office, and that the King's attitude surprised him. For the gossip, see *Life of Duncombe* (1868), I. 204 seq.



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After declining the King's offer of an Earldom and the Garter, Melbourne returned to town, bearing with him the summons from the King to the Duke of Wellington. He was conscious, no doubt, that the "disinterestedness" for which he had himself been so much praised by his Sovereign might not commend itself to the less disinterested among his colleagues; it does not appear, however, that most of them took the news ill when they heard it. He was prepared, in any case, to face them with the sweetest reasonableness; nor, when he got back to London, did he trouble to send round an urgent despatch, but contented himself with ordering his carriage to the house of a London hostess, begging her "to send along any of the Ministers she had." Shortly before midnight the Lord Chancellor burst in upon the meditations of the fallen Minister—only the expression seems incongruous. Such was Brougham's amazement, and such his wrath, when he heard what had happened that Melbourne straitly charged him to say nothing about it until the following morning, when the Cabinet was to meet. This injunction Brougham obeyed in so far that he waited until after midnight before sending an announcement to the *Times*. London was accordingly startled, on the morning of November 15th, 1834, to read that the Government was reported to have been dismissed, and even more startled at an addendum to the report, viz. that "the Queen had done it all." The King also read the announcement with feelings of considerable intensity, and insisted on his Ministers resigning before their successors were appointed. "That we should ever live to see a Tory Government again,"

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said Mr. Taper, "we have reason to be very thankful." "Hush," said Mr. Tadpole, "the time has gone by for Tory Governments. What the country requires is a sound Conservative Government." "A sound Conservative Government," said Taper musingly, "I understand, Tory men and Whig measures."

After a brief interregnum, in which the Duke of Wellington combined all the Secretaryships of State in his own person, Peel arrived from a holiday in Rome. He issued to his constituents the famous "Tamworth Manifesto," of which the spirit was accurately described by Mr. Taper; it was addressed to the great and intelligent class of society "which is much less interested in the contentions of party than in the maintenance of order and good government." There was indeed a good deal of reforming legislation as to which reasonable men of both parties were agreed. The difference between the anti-radical section of the Whigs and the moderate Tories had almost vanished; Melbourne himself is said, though on the very dubious authority of Mrs. Norton, to have actually made overtures to Peel about this time. He felt doubtful about the future; Ireland apart, Peel and he did not differ so very much. But the Whig party as a whole was determined to assert the principle that a Ministry with a majority in the House of Commons should not be dismissed from office by the Crown. Peel had accordingly to be turned out, but it was difficult to decide on what question to turn him out; the more conservative Whigs felt that it would be unfair to do so by way of a vote of want of confidence before he had had a chance. Lord

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John Russell, now the Whig leader in the House of Commons, accordingly determined to take as a test question of Liberal *versus* Conservative policy that of secularising some revenues which were expected to accrue from a better administration of the endowments of the Irish Church. Melbourne himself was not in favour of making this intrinsically not very important matter one of principle, but he was overruled, and, as it turned out, the business was to be a millstone round the neck of the Whig Government for years. On this question Peel was defeated in the House of Commons (April 8th, 1835); his "hundred days" came to an end. But he had done one very important thing even in that short time; he had appointed a body of Ecclesiastical Commissioners to do for the Church what the Whigs were doing for the State. His reputation indeed had been immensely enhanced, and no one recognised this more clearly than Melbourne. The Whigs were not exultant. "I can never remember," said Greville, "a great victory for which *Te Deum* was chanted in so faint a voice." Nor was Melbourne exultant; he foresaw troubles with the King, a small majority in the House of Commons, a minority in the House of Lords; his chief motive for resuming office was, as one who knew him well said, a reluctance to desert his friends. He did his best to induce Grey to return to office as Prime Minister, or if not, as Foreign Secretary. But Grey, though he remained Melbourne's trusted adviser, was inflexibly resolved not to emerge from retirement, and Melbourne accordingly became Prime Minister for the second time. He could hardly have supposed that he was to hold that position for over six years.

## CHAPTER VI

### *PRIME MINISTER*

Mr. Max Beerbohm, some years ago, depicted "The grave misgivings of the Nineteenth Century and the wicked amusement of the Eighteenth in watching the Progress (or whatever it is) of the Twentieth." We are shown the different expressions of countenance with which a young man, in a violent hurry, is being regarded by two elderly gentlemen; the one bald-headed, whiskered, wearing a frock-coat, and with a watch-chain obtrusively displayed over an ample waistcoat; the other slim, clean-shaven, bewigged, clad in an appropriate costume, and taking a pinch of snuff. The stouter of the two may be said to have been born in 1832; Melbourne had, with some apprehensions, assisted at his birth; and the circumstances which preceded his birth and surrounded his earliest infancy would have seemed far more surprising to an eighteenth-century onlooker than anything connected with the advent of his successor.

It was a time of hope, of hope such as had seldom been known before, and has never been known since. To many men who were young in 1832 the struggle between Reformers and anti-Reformers seemed fraught with something of the glow of romance, and the sober provisions of the great Bill itself seemed tinged with the radiance of dawn. Seldom, in all our history, had Parlia-

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ment been the theatre of debates so eagerly awaited, so hotly canvassed, by a whole nation; and seldom had so protracted a political contest issued in a victory more resounding, a defeat more keenly felt. The citadel of privilege had yielded at last to the irresistible onslaught of "the middle class marching in the van and the flower of the working class bringing up the rear," and an immense spring of political and social energy had thereby been liberated. And, though it was a time of the most strenuous political activity, it was not only in a new and enlightened political order that the hope of the future seemed to lie. The opening of the Liverpool and Manchester railway had nearly synchronised with the beginnings of the Reform agitation; science, and especially applied science, was now and for the first time making an impression on the mass of the population; its wonders were being revealed to the middle classes and to intelligent working men by means of cheap publications, popular lectures and Brougham's "Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge"; in this region also there seemed unbounded possibilities open to human endeavour.

It was also a time of debate. The nineteenth century, from 1830 onwards, was ushered in with a volume, a variety and an intensity of discussion which may arouse astonishment even now. "In 1831," says Mozley, "every party, every interest, political and religious, in the country was pushing its claim to universal acceptance, with the single exception of the Church of England, which was folding its robes to die with what decency it could. . . . A thousand projectors

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screamed from a thousand platforms, and England was dinned with philanthropy and revolution, spirituality and reform." This torrent was indeed beginning to abate perceptibly by the end of 1834, but there was still activity enough. The Whigs were placing every department of the national life under searching and prolonged Government scrutiny. Between 1831 and 1836 a series of Royal Commissions investigated the Procedure of the Common Law Courts and the Law of Real Property; the system of Local Government in towns; Conditions in Factories; the Poor Law; the Organisation and Revenues of the Churches of England and Ireland: a series of Parliamentary Committees investigated the Civil List; the Bank of England; National Education; the Revenues of the Irish Church; and the Prevalence of Intoxication—and this list is not exhaustive. The papers of the House of Commons, for the eight years which began in 1833 and ended with the fall of Melbourne's second administration, fill four hundred volumes; the proceedings of one Commission alone fill thirteen folio volumes; those of another are said to weigh twelve stone.

Alongside of this absolutely unprecedented Government activity there poured forth a flood of books and pamphlets on every topic of political and social interest. The conservatism of the majority of conservative people was very largely inarticulate. That of the politicians was, at this time, decidedly destitute of ideas; the philosophic conservatism of Coleridge was hardly adapted for general consumption, and did not affect an attitude which resolved itself for the most part into

the narrowest defence of the "rights of property." On the other side, the cause of Progress was voiced by a variegated assortment of advanced Radicals and steady-going Whigs, the former supplying the driving power. Among the working classes the causes had begun to operate which were, towards the end of the decade, to issue in Chartism. And there were other cross-currents to perplex the observer. Just about the time when Melbourne became Prime Minister, Robert Owen was inaugurating a "New Moral World" by the formation of the "British and Foreign Consolidated Association of Industry, Humanity and Knowledge," which was to work miracles in morals, and also in economics.

In the ecclesiastical, and also in the religious sphere, there was an equal ferment. Even as late as 1830 the position of the Church seems to us, by comparison, to have been almost mediæval. Aristocratic in leadership, "lifting," in Burke's words, "its mitred front in Courts and Parliaments," it was connected by every tie of interest and sentiment with the governing class. It controlled—for liberalism had only just founded University College—nearly all the higher education of the country and most of the rest. It possessed in every parish a representative who enjoyed a social status at any rate which was unquestioned, and provided in the country districts especially most of such civilising and educative influences as then existed. Involved as it was in a range of duties and interests of which it has since been largely deprived, it—and questions connected with it—absorbed an extraordinary amount of the political activity of

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the reforming era. It had quite evidently failed to adapt itself to the needs of the time; the growth of the towns, in particular, had thrown its organisation altogether out of gear; and the Archbishop of Canterbury himself allowed that its condition required amendment. Practitioners of every shade of opinion were accordingly at work on the *corpus vile* of the Established Church. Some wanted to reform it from without, others from within; the main body of the dissenting sects, in temporary and incongruous alliance with O'Connell and the Irish Catholics, wished to do away with it altogether as an Establishment. On the other side, the Oxford Tractarians were beginning to challenge the whole idea of a secular state, to recall the Church to its primitive doctrines and discipline, and to revivify it on a dogmatic basis. The Evangelicals became correspondingly and antagonistically active, and, among stranger religionists, there had been Edward Irving not long before. He had astonished London by claiming the gift of tongues, instituting a new hierarchy, and prophesying the millennium.

Melbourne himself was constitutionally incapable of believing in the proximity of any such event. He had been surveying the scene with an undeluded intelligence, and with a wary eye in which a humorous twinkle was often seen to beacon. He was not exactly "new and green in the ways of this old world"; some of the tendencies which he saw working in the new order of things seemed as old at any rate as the habit of exaggeration; he remembered the high hopes, and the bitter disillusionment, which had been begotten in many generous spirits by the French Revolu-



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tion. Personally, as he once confided to Queen Victoria, he "liked things tranquil and stable." He looked back lovingly to a less complicated age, an age when politics, letters and fashion were intermingled; when political questions were comparatively broad, simple and adapted to a splendid oratory and a leisurely parliamentary procedure; when the people had, and were content to have, "nothing to do with the laws except to obey them"; when the first advances of industrialism were barely perceptible; and political economy, blue-books and statistics had accordingly not become a necessary part of the equipment of every statesman. Nevertheless, he was anything but obscurantist; he was far too intelligent not to recognise that the eighteenth century had gone past recall. He realised quite clearly that considerable institutional adjustments were imperatively demanded by an age of rapid and unprecedented expansion, that some plain injustices had to be done away from society, that new times demanded new men and new methods. But he had had not the least share in the heady optimism which had inaugurated the Era of Reform, and, unlike the Radical section of his nominal followers, had been vouchsafed no glimpse of a promised land. In his view, as in that of a later Prime Minister, "the light-hearted fashion in which many persons sketch out their ideas of a reconstructed society exhibits an almost comic ignorance of our limited powers of political calculation."<sup>1</sup>

Few men, again, can ever have been less deceived by the pomps and powers and all the

<sup>1</sup>Earl of Balfour, *Essays and Addresses* (1893), p. 281.

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"solemn plausibilities" of the world; he had seen much of them, and seen through them. A curious book, he once noted, might be written on the subject of all that has been done by those whose very names have perished, of "the glories of the anonymous." He was not, in particular, tempted to over-rate the amount of influence on the world which it was permitted to the general run of statesmen to exercise, the extent to which they could effectively control the circumstances surrounding them, the difference which they really made to most people's lives. Among the various agencies which had furthered the progress, or changed the condition, of humanity, political action, strictly so termed, did not seem to have held a very prominent place. If, accordingly, "Why not let it alone?" was a suggestion which he had not infrequent occasion to proffer, it was not the expression of laziness or indifference; though it certainly witnessed to a frame of mind in which no politician, we may suppose, can afford to indulge too often. Long years of reflection and study had wrought in him an ever-present consciousness of the fallibility of human criticism as compared with the silent criticism which time and circumstance provide, of the feebleness of human contrivance as measured against the obscure and irresistible forces which shape a nation's destiny. Not Johnson himself was more convinced than Melbourne that our most thoughtful attempts at prediction are mocked by the part which incalculable factors play in the affairs of men. Events tended to take their own course, do what we would; to proceed otherwise than with the utmost circum-

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spection was to mortgage the present to a highly uncertain future. History did not appear to have pronounced in favour of drastic social and political experimentation; the best-planned attempts to anticipate, by sudden and decisive action, the inexorable if tardy judgment which nature executes upon anything unfit to survive, had in the past produced the most unexpected consequences; in the political field, as in others, to uproot the tares without at the same time uprooting the wheat was infinitely difficult under a dispensation which has provided that they should both grow together until the coming of the harvest. What, after all, would the twentieth century pronounce as to the tendencies which he saw shaping the nineteenth?—that he was no stranger to reflections of this kind is evident enough from his letters and papers. Were not the worst enemies of reform often to be found among the reformers?

It may seem an odd point of view for the head of a reforming government. But the incongruity in Melbourne's position was less apparent than might have been supposed. He had as a statesman certain qualities which were exactly what the times required, and just the qualities which were lacking in his distinguished predecessor. Grey had secured the passage of the Reform Bill—it is enough for anyone's fame—but he had stopped there. He could not keep his Government together; he was uncompromisingly hostile to the Radicals and to the Irish; he was constantly threatening to resign before, at the right moment for his reputation, he did so; he had, in effect, shown himself unable or unwilling to

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govern the country under the new conditions. Melbourne, less rigid in opinion, far easier in temper, and with a clearer perception of the inevitable, was better fitted for the task. And, though he was quite destitute of the missionary spirit, his doctrinal unfitness for the position he had rather surprisingly come to occupy may easily be exaggerated. On what were then the test questions of the Catholic claims and of Ireland, he had always been firmly on the Liberal side; and, indeed, though he had at times supported Tory measures, he had never been a Tory. He now saw quite clearly that his private predilections must be postponed to the spirit of the age; and, as we shall see, the combination in him of an acute intellect and a sceptical temperament resulted in a sufficient open-mindedness, and a genuine readiness to be convinced in practical matters. Althorp, one of the most liberal of the Whigs, often remarked to Hatherton that, though Melbourne was generally supposed to be unfavourable to "progress," yet, whenever the degree of any particular change was discussed in the Cabinet, Melbourne had always sided with himself; "reluctantly maybe, but recognising clearly the force of circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

On the other side, Melbourne was faced by an indubitably greater statesman than himself, a statesman who had not been prevented from leading the Tory, as he would have been prevented from leading the Whig party, by the fact that he was a Lancashire manufacturer's son. Peel's posthumous fame has, unlike Melbourne's,

<sup>1</sup>Hatherton, November 25th, 1848.

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been well served; one of the least attractive in himself of our major statesmen, he has been the subject of an unusual amount of attractive writing. The chapter on him in Disraeli's *Life of Lord George Bentinck* is the most striking characterisation of one Prime Minister by another, probably of one great statesman by another, that we possess—the complementary picture by Peel of Disraeli, though doubtless conceived, was unfortunately never drawn. A succession of excellent biographies has followed of recent times, one some years back by Mr. J. R. Thursfield, another, only a year or two ago, by Miss A. A. W. Ramsay; and, more recently still, Peel's leadership of the Conservative party from 1832 to 1841 has formed the subject of a brilliant and exhaustive study by a Cambridge historian. The key which Disraeli found to Peel's career, from his entry into public life until the time when he shattered the party of his long and painful creation, is well known—he found it in his combination of supreme efficiency with a lack of creative imagination. This deficiency deprived him of prescience, rendered him over-receptive of the ideas of others, and, in his middle and later years, left him successively at the mercy of "the Duke of Wellington, the King of the French, Mr. Jones Lloyd, some others, and finally Mr. Cobden." For a full criticism of this estimate, as applied to Peel's last and most important period, we must await the resumption of Mr. Kitson Clarke's labours.

Peel indeed would have renounced for himself any claim to "imaginative statesmanship" as cheerfully as would Melbourne. To neither of them did

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it appear to be a time for heroic measures, but rather for the careful management of complex and contradictory forces. Unlike Melbourne, Peel had been cradled in politics. A member of Parliament at twenty-one, Chief Secretary for Ireland at twenty-four, he had long been in the front rank of political life, had attained a perfect mastery of all the details of public business, and had learned to play upon the House of Commons "like an old fiddle." Though unwilling to change the constitution in Church and State, he can hardly be said to have ever been a Tory, and his great administrative powers had made him a reformer. His economic principles had always been those of the Benthamites; he had approved the new Poor Law, and his general affinities were with the commercial as against the agricultural interests. The reforms which he had already accomplished, in the Currency for example, and in the organisation of the Metropolitan Police Force, are matters of history. But the manner in which he had abandoned previously held positions as regards the Catholic claims and parliamentary reform had earned him the dislike and distrust of the reactionary members of a party which yet could not dispense with his abilities, and he had none of the arts of popularity. His powers of expression flowed almost exclusively in parliamentary channels; his manner was singularly ungenial, and since he suffered from a prickly sensitiveness, often seemed sullen; his rare smiles were likened by his enemy, O'Connell, to "the silver fittings of a coffin." Personally he and Melbourne were antipathetic. A man of impeccable respectability, Peel looked

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askance at a statesman who was not generally supposed to bear that character, and Melbourne could not away with Peel's air of glacial rectitude. "I thought," he once wrote to Lord John Russell, "you would get a nasty kick from Peel. He is not a horse into whose stall you should go unadvisedly, or without speaking to him first"; he seems to have suspected, moreover, that Peel's obtrusive appreciation of the righteousness of his own motives covered a great deal of self-seeking ambition. Politically, it was a different matter; in that field the two men had a tolerable understanding of one another during their six years of a limited and peculiar opposition.

Each had to restrain the wild men on his own side. Each was, in his way, especially concerned with maintaining the integrity of the British Constitution. It was something which stirred in our grandfathers a complex of sentiments half prim and half romantic; it was one of the few things in which Melbourne, no less than Peel, really believed; it had recently escaped, if it had escaped, serious danger. To preserve its balance on the side of "property and intelligence" they were equally determined; and they conceived that their determination was shared by at any rate the vast majority of such of their countrymen as were entitled to entertain, or at any rate to exercise, political opinions. Some of the institutions of which it was the centre needed bringing up to date; in this they were both agreed; they were agreed also that the process would be endangered equally by the impossible demands of the Radicals and the sheer obstructiveness of the Tories.

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With Peel was ranged the Duke of Wellington. August, revered, carrying, simply and without arrogance, a greater load of honours, and of honour, than has since fallen to the lot of any British subject; plain in his personal tastes and habits; undertaking, with methodical laboriousness, a daily mass of business which he seemed unable or unwilling to delegate, he stood, a monument of Duty. His whole outlook differed from that of a civilian statesman; in his hatred of war, for example, and in the literal and military manner in which he interpreted the maxim that the King's Government must be carried on. He had shown himself ready in the past to form a government under any circumstances, on any terms, at his Sovereign's command; he would have been ready to do so now, but it was no longer necessary; and he accordingly stood at Peel's right hand, in the suspicious attitude of a deaf man surrounded by many voices. In the political campaign which, much against his own will, he had been ordered to undertake some years before, his strategy had altogether deserted him; he had left no possible line of retreat open, had fought to the last moment, and then surrendered at discretion. The existing situation presented itself to his mind in its simplest terms. Position after position had been captured from the old order in Church and State; the worst indeed had not happened, but it might happen yet, and it was one of the elementary duties of a commander not to underrate the strength of the enemy. The Tories obviously could not form a government; the Whigs, who had in a manner ridden the whirlwind, seemed capable of



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managing a reformed Parliament; in these circumstances he had no desire to turn them out. Melbourne and his colleagues were not themselves Radicals and revolutionaries; they were of the traditional breed, in spite of the political company they kept. And the Duke seems to have liked Melbourne personally better than he liked Peel.

It was not upon the Duke, still less upon the infinitely smaller men who shared his views, that Peel could build a Conservatism which had the promise of a future. To do so was to be his task from 1835 to 1841; the manner in which he performed it has won the admiration of historians. To this end he had to bide his time, to watch opportunities, to guide, by every statesmanlike art, the drift of circumstance. In the constituencies, he had to foster a public opinion. In Parliament he had to manage the Duke, to submit at first to be thwarted by the wreckers on his own side, and to begin by seeing the House of Lords go as near as it could to provoking another open conflict with the people. He had to give many of the Government's measures the support which they obviously deserved. But he had at the same time to educate his party in concerted opposition, to show them sufficient sport to keep them in mettle, and to select suitable ground on which to fight. He found it, unfortunately, in one field in which he differed sincerely from the Government, and that was Ireland. He had, years before, administered the country capably, conscientiously and in the spirit of the Protestant Ascendancy; and had come away with a hatred of the people which was to be an important factor in the politics

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of the time. Peel's attitude to Ireland is, indeed, a blot on his fame. The Irish Church, in particular, was as sacrosanct in his eyes as the English Church; to deprive it of any of its revenues would be the merest truckling to O'Connell—a man who would, if he could, have broken up the Empire.

Since Peel was prevented from doing what was required, Melbourne accordingly set himself to carry on the King's Government. He approached his task in a spirit of the greatest circumspection. He was, indeed, too fatalistic to be an alarmist. The Reform Bill had been passed without a revolution; even the new House of Commons did not appear to differ very much from the old. But no one knew better than the former Home Secretary how narrow the margin of safety had in fact been. He had seen the whole machinery of government on the very edge of breakdown; an external organisation prepared to assume its functions; the King contemplating, if only for a moment, retirement to Hanover. He was determined that nothing resembling such a situation should re-occur in his time if he could help it; nor could he foresee the future of our institutions with the certainty of observers after the event. As regards the immediate prospect, the most obvious fact was that it was extremely difficult to form any government at all on the basis of a public opinion which was groping amidst the complexities of new conditions, and confused by an unprecedented multitude of counsellors. He was accordingly "for holding the ground already taken, but not for occupying new ground rashly."

It is easy enough to represent this observation

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as expressing a mere determination to resist all changes, except such as he might be forced to comply with. But there was far more to it than this. Melbourne was anything but a blind reactionary; he was willing, as he showed again and again, to "take each man's censure and reserve his judgment." He was indeed resolved to do nothing to weaken such essential elements of the Constitution as the House of Lords and the Church of England; he was also convinced, as things were, that the adoption of the Radical programme would weaken the House of Commons also. Nor was he anxious to take any great step forward until he was satisfied that public opinion had clearly declared itself. But, as he fully recognised, a real break had been made with the old political order; the Reform Bill—and he had never believed in its "finality"—would have consequences; having swallowed the camel he was not disposed to strain at the gnat. Short of tampering with fundamental institutions, and when it was a question of conferring some obvious benefit which was demanded by the liberal elements in the country, he was, as we shall see, prepared to go any lengths. But it was not a time at which it was permitted to any statesman to steer a direct course; there were too many cross currents. The spirit in which Melbourne steered his own course he once explained to Russell. "My esoteric doctrine . . . is that, if you entertain any doubt, it is safest to take the unpopular side in the first instance. The transition from the unpopular is easy and prosperous travelling. But from the popular to the unpopular the ascent is so steep and rugged that it is im-

possible to master it." In effect, his native and unbiassed common-sense helped to supply the alloy which was to shape the pure metal of Benthamite reform into a serviceable tool.<sup>1</sup> And Melbourne understood his countrymen a good deal better than Bentham.

He began decisively enough. It was, he told Grey, a fresh start, and he meant to have a free hand. He again gave the King clearly to understand that it was for himself and not for His Majesty to decide on the composition of the Government, and that he must be free to do what he thought best with the Irish Church. In forming his Government his proceedings may be commended to the consideration of those who suppose him to have been a weak man. The formidable and irritable Wellesley had consented to return to Ireland as Lord Lieutenant under Grey. But Melbourne had never forgiven him for his share in the affair that had brought the late Government down, and was determined that he should hold no post of importance in any Ministry of which he himself was the head. When the Marquess realised that he was not to be consulted in Irish arrangements his wrath was terrible; it was expressed, according to the testimony of an astonished hearer, "at the full stretch of his voice for exactly an hour by the clock on the mantelpiece." The offence, he said, could only be expiated in blood; he would send instantly to his respected and gallant friend Lord Howden; a meeting must be arranged for the very next morn-

<sup>1</sup>For a small but definite instance, see his letter on prison reform in *Papers*, p. 162 seq.

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ing. He calmed down; but, when Melbourne went to see him, high words were exchanged between the two. Wellesley complained bitterly of Melbourne's language; it was "rough, vulgar and such as had never been employed from a person in his station to a person in mine." "You wrote," he reported Melbourne as saying, "an imprudent letter to Lord Grey. The moment I read that letter I determined that in the reconstitution of the government of Ireland there must be a *general sweep*."<sup>1</sup> Wellesley, by a phrase in his will, carried his chagrin beyond the grave. He died in 1842, the greatest man, it has been said, who ever suffered his life to be embittered by the desire to become a Duke.

There was an even more important member of the later Government whose prestige, though diminished, was still very great, and whose oratorical power was especially needed in a Tory House of Lords. But Brougham had proved himself to be an absolutely impossible colleague, and Melbourne resolved to put the Great Seal into commission. Brougham demanded an explanation, and got one.

"You must be aware," Melbourne wrote, "that your character and conduct have since November last formed the principal and general topic of debate and discussion. I believe myself to have said little or nothing anywhere upon the subject. I have written little or nothing except to one or two persons, and that in the strictest confidence. At Lord Holland's, where politics are talked every day and all day long, it is, of course, to be expected that more observations have been made; but if

<sup>1</sup>Wellesley Papers, II. 299. Hatherton, April 18th, 1835.

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you believe that any hostility or malignity towards you has prevailed there, as far as I have been witness to what has passed, I can assure you that you are misinformed.

"It is a very disagreeable task to have to say to a statesman that his character is injured in the public estimation; it is still more unpleasant to have to add that you consider this his own fault; and it is idle to expect to be able to convince any man, and more particularly a man of very superior abilities, and of unbounded confidence in those abilities, that this is the truth. I must, however, state plainly that your conduct was one of the principal causes of the dismissal of the late Ministry, and that it forms the most popular justification of that step."<sup>1</sup>

In reply, apparently, to further remonstrances: "Allow me to observe," Melbourne rejoined, "that there may be a course and series of very objectionable conduct, there may be a succession of acts which destroy confidence and add offence to offence, and yet it may be very difficult to point out any great and marked delinquency. I will, however, tell you fairly that, in my opinion, you domineered too much; you interfered too much with other departments; you encroached upon the province of the Prime Minister; you worked, as I believe, with the Press in a manner unbecoming the dignity of your station, and you formed political views of your own and pursued them by means which were unfair to your colleagues. . . ."

Melbourne's action appears to have struck his colleagues with something like awe. When, some

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 257 seq.

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time afterwards, a safe appointment was made to the Woolsack; "I feel," he said to Plunket, "like a man who has got rid of a termagant mistress and married the best of cooks."

He appointed to the Cabinet one man of a new type, who had obtained office at the very end of Grey's administration. This was C. Poulett Thomson (Lord Sydenham), the son of a merchant, who had been put into business at an age when his colleagues were still at Eton. Palmerston was again given the Foreign Office, rather against Melbourne's desire, who appears at that time to have shared the general Whig distrust of his future brother-in-law, and had been strongly against Palmerston's policy of intervention in Portugal. Palmerston was suspect as an ex-Tory; his foreign policy—which tended away from France—was not in accordance with traditional Whig doctrine, and he was much given to going, and getting, his own way. And there were more personal reasons why he was coldly regarded by his colleagues; though he was equal to any of them in point of birth and breeding, there was something in his general deportment which offended their fastidious tastes. Melbourne himself had a rough edge to his tongue on the infrequent occasions when he was seriously annoyed; nor was he by any means always choice in his language or his topics—still, he was all this with a difference. Whereas Palmerston's voice was loud and his manner jaunty; he was in the habit of discussing momentous questions of policy in metaphors derived from the game of cricket; some remembered—and it struck them as "exquisite"—a *mot* of Canning's, "that Palmerston always put

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him in mind of a footman who thought his mistress was in love with him, and was mistaken." However, he and Melbourne had both been disciples of the same great statesman, and they pulled together quite well on the whole. But foreign affairs were not of pressing importance at the time as compared with domestic affairs; it was on Lord John Russell, now Home Secretary and leader of the House of Commons, that there fell the burden and heat of the day.

That bustling statesman was Melbourne's antithesis and corrective. He was a man of formulæ rather than of ideas—and indeed his enemies were inclined to question whether great ideas were likely to be lodged in a body so small as to have earned him the nickname, in allusion to his first wife, of "the widow's mite." Intensely conscious of the traditions of his house, he cherished a doctrinaire faith in Whig shibboleths and in the perfections of the Reform Bill by which Melbourne was quite unencumbered. Cold and stiff in manner, and absorbed in the business of the moment, he was apt to forget the faces and almost the existences of his parliamentary supporters. Lord John's undoubted zeal and capacity for promoting measures through Parliament contrasted equally strongly with Melbourne's almost exaggerated belief in the unforeseen potentialities which lurked in the most deeply pondered legislation. As a colleague he was not altogether easy; of a restless activity, he was apt to move without consulting others, and his judgment was by no means always sound. "There is not a better man in England than Lord John Russell," said Sydney



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Smith, "but his worst fault is that he is utterly ignorant of all moral fear; there is nothing that he would not undertake. I believe he would perform the operation for the stone—build St. Peter's—or assume (with or without ten minutes' notice) the command of the Channel Fleet; and no one would discover by his manner that the patient had died—the Church tumbled down—and the Channel Fleet been knocked to atoms." The quality, and the limitations, of Lord John Russell's enthusiasms are peculiarly difficult of comprehension by a later generation; but his services in bringing our institutions up to date during this decade were very great, and have been unjustly obscured by the comparative ineffectiveness of his later years.

It was, however, the Irish, or rather their tremendous leader, who provided the most interesting incidents in the formation of Melbourne's second Government. O'Connell, in the Reform Bill debates, had alluded to the "Glorious Revolution of 1688" with a respect that sounds strange now as coming from one of his nation and his creed; in Parliament, indeed, he ranked not merely as an advanced Liberal but as a Radical. Exasperated by Grey and Stanley, he had since, as we have seen, raised the standard of Repeal of the Union. The perplexed Whigs now considered whether he could be bought by an offer of a post in the Government. Melbourne was firmly of the opinion that he could not. "You cannot buy a man without paying something of his price. You cannot pay O'Connell's price. . . . Taking office would not shake his influence with the people of

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Ireland a jot. The people of Ireland are not such damned fools as the people of England. When they place confidence they do not withdraw it the next instant. They do not suffer their opinions to be changed in a day by the leading article of a newspaper. When they trust a man, when they are really persuaded that he has their interests at heart, they do not throw him off because he does something which they cannot immediately understand or explain. On the contrary, they think that he probably knows what he's about, that what he does is done to serve them, and they cling to him the closer on account of any apparent inconsistency."<sup>1</sup>

The circumstances in which the Irish party—that indigestible substance in the Victorian body politic—first became a real force in the House of Commons are worthy of some recapitulation. The Whigs, though they could not now dispense with the Irish vote, were exceedingly nervous of a formal and overt alliance with one to whom their attitude was that of a gentleman perpetually liable to be accosted by an undesirable acquaintance on the steps of his club. O'Connell was, in his own country, a man of good family, the leader of the Irish Bar, an unselfish patriot, the greatest Irishman who ever lived; whereas in England he was a bog-trotting scoundrel, an incendiary agitator, and the enemy of England and King William IV. Just before Melbourne took office for the second time, Lord John Russell consulted his august father<sup>2</sup> as to what had better be done with the Radicals, and O'Connell and his followers were,

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 210.

<sup>2</sup>Walpole, *Life of Lord John Russell*, I. 219 seq.

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in the eyes of orthodox Whigs, several degrees worse than the Radicals. "There is a medium," replied that sound Whig the Duke of Bedford, "and you may act in co-operation with these men for a great public good without trusting them or placing implicit confidence in them"—adding a very pertinent reminder as to where Grey and his Reform Bill would have been without the help of the detested Radicals. In this spirit Lord John was doubtless prepared to act, when, whether by accident or design, and certainly without his knowledge, one of the Whig managers sent to O'Connell, for distribution among his followers, a batch of printed invitations to a party meeting. O'Connell made haste to reply by a friendly letter, addressed direct to Lord John and promising co-operation. It was an embarrassing proposal, and Lord John might subsequently have been observed hesitating, long and painfully, between two alternative drafts of a reply; in the end, that one was dispatched which was infused with a few more drops of cordiality than the other. O'Connell, a man of great resource and great self-control when it came to a deal, understood. Nothing more was said for the moment, and nothing was ever written down. He and his followers presented themselves at the party meeting held at Lord Lichfield's town house, and the Whigs found themselves committed to an undefined but none the less real association with a parliamentary group of whom some were Irish gentlemen in their eyes, but others were gentlemen from Ireland.

Melbourne, indeed, was far too cautious to commit himself, or to know anything officially of the

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"Lichfield House compact." He was questioned on this point by a noble lord, subsequently alluded to as "a bloated buffoon" by O'Connell in the House of Commons. "I am asked," Melbourne replied, "how far I coincide in the opinions of Mr. O'Connell about the Union with Ireland; I answer, not at all. I am asked whether I am to have the aid of Mr. O'Connell; I reply, that I cannot tell. And lastly, on what terms; I answer, I have made no terms with him whatever."<sup>1</sup> None the less, it was tacitly understood that O'Connell would drop his Repeal agitation and vote with the Whigs. They, in their turn, would insist on diverting some part of the revenues of the Irish Church to secular uses, and towards the general education of the people; also—a matter in which they needed no incentive—they would promote other legislation for the welfare of Ireland. Both O'Connell and the Whigs did their best; that the Whigs could not fully carry out their share of the bargain was not their fault. It was a bargain fraught with inconvenience to both sides; O'Connell lost influence in Ireland just as the Whigs did in England. But it gave Ireland a few of the most tranquil years that she ever enjoyed during at any rate the first half of the nineteenth century.

There were, however, other than political incompatibilities at work. "The great Dan," says Mr. Saintsbury, "was a gentleman in his way, but his way was not that of members of his class in England." Members of his class in England looked askance at a gentleman who possessed and exer-

<sup>1</sup>Torrens gives a more pointed version of Melbourne's words than Hansard, 27, 1002.

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cised powers of vituperation which rivalled those of Demosthenes and excelled those of Burke, but declined the challenges which his eloquence provoked. This might arise, they were ready to admit, from a conscientious objection to duelling, and they knew that O'Connell had killed his man many years ago; but in that case, they thought, he should display a similar conscientiousness in his choice of epithets. And those who had to do business with the Liberator were disconcerted to observe that his manner, generally of a boisterous geniality, changed, on such occasions, to one of a smoothness and a finesse that seemed attributable to the Jesuit College where he had been educated. But it was O'Connell's language in public that put him beyond the pale, and the more so because it appeared to be not so much spontaneous as calculated. Melbourne wished a friend would point out to him how his "low scurrility" degraded himself and his cause. Nevertheless, fair-minded as ever, he reminded the King that he had heard as objectionable speeches from others, which only differed from O'Connell's in being less effective.<sup>1</sup> The Whigs—it is difficult to blame them—would not admit O'Connell to their houses; there is a story of how moved he was when unexpectedly invited into the drawing-room of a great Whig house where he had called on political business. At one time they called on him to resign from Brooks', and, when he would not, resigned themselves in considerable numbers. However, O'Connell was in a commanding position and knew it; it was through him that the Whigs were really to

<sup>1</sup> *Papers*, pp. 293, 296.

rule Ireland. Office—whether he really wanted it or not—he did not obtain; he had indeed previously refused an offer from Grey because it was not accompanied by the promise of a more liberal policy towards his own country. Nothing can be said against O’Connell as an agitator. But a great deal may be said against him as a statesman; and it is difficult to refrain from saying it when we consider the manner in which he neglected the economic problems of his country, dilated to his vast audiences on the unparalleled virtues of themselves and their land, and taught them to regard the cause of their misfortunes as lying entirely in England and not at all in themselves. Such had not been the way of Swift, who wrote a *Proposal for the use of Irish Manufactures* as well as the *Drapier’s Letters*, or of that purer and gentler spirit, the author of the *Querist*. But O’Connell’s enemies have never denied that he loved his country, and his Church, better than he loved himself.

Melbourne’s second Government, having been purged of its irreconcilables at either end, was comparatively homogeneous, and more liberal in temper than Grey’s. But his party was as composite as ever, and far weaker numerically. No wonder, when someone once promised him support so long as he was in the right, he replied that “that was no use at all; what he really wanted was support when he was in the wrong.” The great parliamentary majority with which Grey had ushered in the era of Reform had melted away; the General Election of 1835 had left the Whigs with a fluctuating majority of only twenty to forty in the House of Commons, and

they were in a permanent minority in the House of Lords. However, seeing that it was the Radicals as well as the Conservatives who had, for the time being, increased their representation at the expense of the Whigs, the reforming impulse, though very perceptibly diminished, was not exhausted. Round a solid core of Whigs, or moderate reformers of various degrees of moderation, there hung a motley fringe of Radicals, English, Scotch and Irish, of various degrees of progressiveness. The parliamentary Radicals of that age cannot be regarded as ancestors of the modern Labour party; and, indeed, it would have been, if possible, even harder for a working man to have got into the reformed than into the unreformed Parliament. The Irish voted with the Radicals in general. But they were really interested solely in their native country; they voiced her cause with great power of lung, and, on occasion, with noises that seemed to emanate from a farmyard, and distressed the House.

Holding themselves severely aloof from the Irish were a special group of the Radical party. Among these were Grote—his formidable wife could not then sit in Parliament—Hume, Roebuck and a few others of the intellectual following of Bentham; behind them, urging and reproaching, was one who had been a working man, the sagacious but cross-grained Francis Place. It appeared, however, that ability had been granted to the Radicals in a greater degree than a sense for the complexity of human affairs; single-subject men for the most part, they urged their various subjects upon the House with a general disregard of times and seasons; their reward was a distinctly frigid recep-

tion. They were far too divided in opinion to form a parliamentary party. Nor, Parliament apart, were they the kind of men to head a popular movement. A deep divergence of temper, indeed, was soon to become apparent between the instinctive and fiery radicalism of the working men's leaders and the reasoned and cool radicalism of the thinkers and the parliamentarians. Among the latter were the men who had made the Poor Law of 1834, men who stood for a *régime* of unregulated competition, who appeared to be more concerned for what they held to be "progress" than for human flesh and blood, and foreshadowed the "Manchester School."

"A fool, but an honest man," was a definition Melbourne once gave of a doctrinaire, glancing thereby at the Philosophic Radicals. What he meant is sufficiently evident. Honest indeed they were, and courageous; for a man of the comfortable classes to avow himself a Radical in those days was no light matter; the historian of Greece was not the only one of them who, so long as he was active in politics, incurred something like social ostracism from the class to which he belonged by birth and education. Another, J. A. Roebuck, was subsequently the subject of much raillery from Matthew Arnold; and it must be admitted that a survey of his opinions and proceedings during these years makes it abundantly clear why the Philosophic Radicals were so unpopular. Roebuck's programme comprised items of which some were accepted by the nation at the time, others were accepted later, and others have not been accepted yet. He advocated not only Univer-



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sal Suffrage, Triennial Parliaments, and Vote by Ballot; but also an "elective magistracy," the abolition of the legal monopoly enjoyed by the Inns of Court, a national system of secular education, disestablishment of the Church and devotion of its property to secular uses. His list of aversions was comprehensive. He naturally hated the Tories; the Whigs he hated also as Tories in disguise; he did not love the middle classes, and he had no high opinion of the working classes, to whom he was capable of telling the most unpalatable home truths. He heralded the session of 1836 by broaching a plan for the Government of England by the Radicals. "Considering," says his biographer, "that the staunch and reliable Radicals who were members of the House of Commons numbered not more than twenty, this was a bold proposition."

Ineffective in Parliament, the Radicals were far more effective in other directions, both in home and in colonial affairs. They comprised men of all kinds, including some who had nothing in common with the austerer type of Benthamism and the spirit of the new Poor Law. Some of them were active in the foundation of South Australia; Wakefield and Molesworth were the chief movers in the colonisation of New Zealand; Buller and Wakefield, by their association with the Durham Report, exercised a profound influence on the administration of Canada and indirectly of the Empire as a whole. The Whigs, indeed, owed the Radicals a debt which seems greater to the historian than it did to themselves; at the time there subsisted between the two sides the mutual suspicion natural as between men possessed by ideas, and

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men who were expected to translate those ideas, or some of them, into practice. With his deep sense of the inadequacy of formulæ to life Melbourne could not go a great way with the extreme Benthamites ; nor, in particular, were their bureaucratic leanings congenial to the average Englishman of that day. But, as we have already remarked, while their underlying doctrines were one thing, their expert knowledge was another. The Reform Bill had inaugurated an era of administrative reform ; common-sense and rule of thumb no longer sufficed for dealing with the problems of a society which was yearly becoming more numerous, more industrialised and more complex. The times now demanded the application of exact knowledge over a wide social field, and the specialists came to their own. The Benthamites had seats on the numerous Commissions of Enquiry issued by the Government ; their ideas and their knowledge were abundantly utilised in various aspects of legal, financial and local government reform, and were not infrequently embodied in legislation. But the legislation of the 'thirties was predominantly Whig, not Radical legislation ; the Benthamites were experts rather than statesmen ; and the Whigs ought not to be deprived of the credit due to them in a domain where ideas came more easily than their application. It was for the Whigs, and for Melbourne especially, to judge of seasons and opportunities, to graft the new on the old, to adapt Benthamism to human weakness, to manage Parliament, and to decide how much reform the country would stand all at once.

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Under the not very encouraging conditions above described, the Government were pledged to do two things chiefly: first, to continue on lines already laid down the reforming policy which was largely a corollary of 1832. The reform of the Poor Law had been the last important act of the Grey Ministry; there remained, as we have already seen, numerous other matters which were forming or had formed subjects of Government enquiry. Chief among them were the state of the English and Irish municipalities, of the revenues of the English and Irish Churches, and of the Poor Law in Ireland—all contentious, all certain to upset old and vested interests. Secondly, the Government had to repair the neglect of its predecessor by at least endeavouring to govern Ireland in accordance with the needs and wishes of the majority of the population.

This programme, however arduous and however necessary, was not of the sort to issue in any spectacular triumph for Melbourne or his Government. Nor was its execution rendered easier by the fact that the decisive victory had been won, and that it now remained to follow it up. The new Poor Law Act, for example, had just been passed; it remained for Melbourne to administer that intensely unpopular measure. From every point of view his task was more ungrateful than Grey's, just as his opportunities were far more restricted. The King disliked the whole of the reforming programme, and declared that he would sooner have the Devil than any of the Whigs in his house. His Majesty's preference thus deprived his Ministers not only of the support on which

they had a right to reckon, but also of some innocent entertainment, as on one occasion, when the King gave a dinner party to high officers of both services. "Here on my right," said His Majesty, with, we are told, especial emphasis, "is my noble friend, a general descended from a line of ancestry as ancient as my own; and here on my left is my gallant friend, a rear-admiral descended from the very dregs of the people." But some of his ebullitions were not so amusing. In Canada, for example, a state of things was arising somewhat resembling that in Ireland, and due to somewhat similar causes. Lord Gosford was proceeding thither as Governor-General. "Mind what you are about in Canada," the King had said to him. "By God, I will never consent to alienate the Crown lands, or to make the Council elective. Mind me, my Lord, the Cabinet is not my Cabinet. They had better take care, or I will have them impeached!" Melbourne had to report this to his incensed colleagues, and to smooth matters down. "It is better not to quarrel with him," he said, "he is evidently in a state of great excitement."

But William IV was the least of Melbourne's problems. His chief difficulty lay with the House of Lords, which began by throwing out, besides the Government's Irish Tithes Bill, Bills for the removal of Jewish disabilities and for admitting Dissenters to the Universities. The Upper House, indeed, showed itself under its least attractive aspect during these years. In general ability probably, and certainly in ability to understand and interpret national feeling, it was inferior to what it had been in the eighteenth century. Pitt and

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his successors had swamped it with new creations; it is significant that, of the one hundred and twelve Peers of creations before 1790, no fewer than a hundred and eight voted for the Reform Bill and only four against it.<sup>1</sup> The majority of the Lords were now eager to be revenged on the Commons; and they had plenty of opportunity. Conservatism was being educated in the one House, and exploited in the other. In the House of Commons there was Peel, intent on moulding his party into a progressive and reasonable political force, and refraining from anything like an indiscriminate opposition to the reforming legislation of the Whigs. In the House of Lords on the other hand the obscurantism of the majority found powerful expression, principally through a lawyer and an ecclesiastic. The ecclesiastic was the pugnacious and reactionary Bishop Henry Philpotts, who lay heavily on the diocese of Exeter until he was turned ninety, and is still faintly remembered by name in the West Country. Of him it was said that "when he was in hot water with anybody he prayed for his adversary with such malicious fervour that a little light cursing would have been a relief to the sufferer"; he once entered a protest in the Journals of the House of Lords to the effect that the passing of the Irish Municipal Corporations Bill "provoked the justice of Almighty God."

More important than this astonishing prelate was Lord Lyndhurst, a perfected example of the lawyer in politics. Without strong political ambitions, though sometimes mentioned as a Tory Prime

<sup>1</sup>Kent, *English Radicals*, p. 95.

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Minister, he was content to lend the Tory Peers the assistance of consummate legal and very considerable oratorical powers. Lyndhurst was the most formidable adversary Melbourne had to face in the House of Lords. With Brougham, who, for all his extraordinary abilities, was excitable and indiscreet, he could often deal pretty well, but Lyndhurst was neither excitable nor indiscreet. And the Whig measures, however excellent in intention, were not always well drafted. On every weak point in the numerous and complicated Bills sent up to the Lords by a majority of the House of Commons Lyndhurst swooped like a hawk. That such criticism sometimes resulted in useful amendments need not be denied. And, no doubt, the impatience of a great legal intellect with ill-considered and ill-drafted details may be allowed to have counted for something in his attitude. But that his motives were mainly obstructive is as good as admitted by Lyndhurst himself when, in 1837, he told Greville that "he should not go on this year as he had done in the last."

Melbourne did his best. As a speaker, he was always sincere and often interesting; nor had his style become conventionalised by constant practice from his youth. But with his hesitations, his bluntness, and his lack of fluency he could not compare with such orators as Brougham, Lyndhurst and Philpotts. Not always having a precise acquaintance with the details of the numerous Bills promoted by his Government, he was apt to generalise too much, and he did not display a great deal of what is now called "punch." Now and then, indeed, when really roused, he would suddenly

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confound his adversaries by a sledge-hammer stroke. "My Lords," he said of Brougham in 1838, "your Lordships have heard the powerful speech of the noble and learned Lord, one of the most powerful ever delivered in this House, and I leave your Lordships to consider what *must* be the strength and nature of the objections which prevent any Government from availing themselves of the services of such a man."<sup>1</sup> But Lyndhurst's command of elaborate and polished sarcasm occasionally drove him to retorts which savoured of a bludgeon against a rapier; *e.g.* "I have always expressed a great respect for the noble and learned Lord's abilities (a pause), and I repeat what I have more than once in this House stated, that I confine my respect to his abilities." Once it nearly came to a duel between them.

Melbourne's general attitude towards the reforming legislation which was begun under Grey and continued under himself was that of a cautious criticism. This attitude was quite distinct from the lazy indifference which he not unsuccessfully endeavoured to assume. Just as he had loyally supported Grey, so he loyally accepted Grey's legacy. He had indeed no great sympathy with the newly-enfranchised middle class, more especially with the political Dissenters and the newer race of "master-manufacturers." Nor, accordingly, was he equally enthusiastic for all items of a legislative programme which was almost entirely designed to meet their needs and wishes. This legislation was necessary; Melbourne acquiesced in it; but it was middle-class legislation, and was

<sup>1</sup>The force of this is lost in the Hansard report, 43. 69.

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not calculated to appeal warmly to the landed gentry, or to the working classes. What the latter thought of it is writ large in the history of Chartism.

Profoundly suspicious though Melbourne was of the Benthamite Radicals, his Government was quite unable to get on without their expert assistance. They supplied the Whigs with, among other things, economic knowledge and principles; as economists they were the grimmest exponents of *laissez faire*, combining a distrust of state intervention in this sphere with demands for it in others. It so happened that the Benthamites got an unusually free hand in framing the new Poor Law legislation, seeing that it was to the interest of the landed classes to support any proposals which would eliminate the extravagance of the old system. The new legislation, framed largely by Chadwick, accordingly bore all the marks of Benthamite doctrine; centralised supervision, new administrative areas created *ad hoc*, salaried officials. Social science was a new and terrible thing in those days; never, before or since, did it come into sharper conflict with custom than it did on that occasion—and, as it seemed to many, not only with custom, but with the sanctities of family life, and the kindlier instincts of human nature itself. The Poor Law Act of 1834 was indeed social surgery of the most drastic. Cast-iron regulations, administered by impersonal officials, replaced the inefficient, if human, laxity of local magistrates. The Cabinet were not quite unanimous; the Tory Duke of Richmond protested outright. It was monstrous to refuse relief absolutely to the able-



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bodied unless they would go into workhouses and be separated from their wives and families; if they once got into them they would never get out again. Melbourne, then at the end of his time as Home Secretary, also felt uneasy. He knew well enough that an end had somehow to be made of the vicious system by which labourers' wages were supplemented out of the rates. But he disliked the ruthlessness of the change, found it hard to stomach the "Workhouse Test," and foresaw the loathing with which Bumble and his like would be regarded by the poor. But there seemed nothing else for it, and, when the Bill came up to the House of Lords, he supported it in a brief and obligatory speech, in which he dwelt mainly on the necessity of taking out of private hands the administration of such large sums of money. Otherwise he "shrugged his shoulders as he perfunctorily said 'Content,' and muttered to himself something which had very much the sound of profane swearing."<sup>1</sup>

But it was a very different matter with the Municipal Corporations Reform Bill of 1835, which laid the foundation of Local Government in towns as it remains to this day. Here at any rate was a gross abuse which could be remedied without touching the fundamental structure of our institutions. The new boroughs created by the Reform Bill had no municipal government; what passed for such in many of the older boroughs was in a condition which varied from the obsolete to the scandalous. In the worst cases close and corrupt little corporations, controlled by no public

<sup>1</sup>Torrens, p. 285.

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opinion, administered, often for their own personal benefit, property intended for purposes of charity, education and general utility, and left the towns without water, lighting or paving. Melbourne had had a good deal to do with these bodies as Home Secretary, and a Commission had been appointed to enquire into them under Grey. Joseph Parkes, the Birmingham reformer, had been secretary of that Commission; he converted Melbourne to the idea of a ratepayers' suffrage, who proceeded to convert a hostile Cabinet. Melbourne told the King that, while he had had, like other public men, more than once to acquiesce in proposals as to which he himself entertained doubts, he had "a strong and sincere opinion" in this matter.<sup>1</sup>

It was a tremendous undertaking, second only in importance to the Reform Bill, and touching the lives of ordinary men and women a good deal more nearly than that measure. Prescriptions, Royal Charters, hosts of vested interests were against it. "The quiet citizen," says the Radical historian of those times, "who strongly suspected that the funds of an orphan girls' school went to support a brothel, or who could never obtain admission to a charity trust because it was supposed that he would remonstrate against the frequent banquets at the expense of the trust—the peaceable Dissenter, who found himself put aside in times of public danger because the loyal corporation charged him with wishing to burn down the Cathedral—the unexceptionable tradesman, who found himself cut out by the idle and unskilful because they had corporation connection—such

<sup>1</sup>Buckley, *Joseph Parkes of Birmingham*, p. 121, *Papers*, p. 282.

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men as these had no chance of being heard against the sharp and unscrupulous lawyers, the rabble of venal voters, the compact body of town contractors, who clamoured, as for life, for the maintenance of things as they were."<sup>1</sup>

The Bill, which comprised about two hundred clauses, passed the House of Commons, mainly owing to Peel's support. The Lords girt themselves for battle. Prominent among the die-hards was the famous Duke of Newcastle, whose views as to the political rights of his tenants were embodied in his historic saying, "May I not do what I will with my own?" His sentence was for open war—the Bill was a gross interference with the rights of private property, and should be at once thrown out. But this was a little too much for the majority, who preferred to proceed by less direct methods. Lyndhurst bent all his powers towards giving the Bill a "conservative complexion"—behind Lyndhurst may be dimly discerned the figure of the young Disraeli. The Lords decided to hear Counsel and subsequently evidence on behalf of the corporations; the Bill, seriously altered, was sent back to the Commons, whence it was returned again to the Lords. There was no pretence of agreement between Peel and Lyndhurst—"Damn Peel, what is Peel to me?" he is reported to have said. Melbourne did not conceal his alarm; the Reform Bill crisis seemed likely to be repeated; he warned the Lords of the madness of setting themselves against the deliberate judgment of the people. Public opinion was roused, and at last, and in many essentials, the Bill was

<sup>1</sup>Martineau, *History of the Peace*, III. 224 seq.

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allowed to pass. The middle classes—for the new franchise was in effect a middle-class one—had again had their way against the territorial aristocracy; the old corporations died unregretted, save in one respect. Even that “bigot of the iron time,” Harriet Martineau, could not repress a sigh at the disappearance of the relics of mediæval pageantry which had still clung to them. “It was a great thing,” she wrote, “to see our country planted over with little republics, where the citizens would henceforth be trained to political thought and public virtue; but it seemed a pity that the city feasts must go—the processions be seen no more—the gorgeous dresses be laid by—the banners be folded up—the dragon be shelved, and St. George never allowed to wear his armour again, and the gay runners, in their pink-and-blue jerkins, their peaked shoes and rosettes, and their fearful wooden swords, turned into mere weavers, tinkers and shoemakers.” Melbourne may have shared her slight regret in this respect, if not the full extent of her optimism, when he contemplated what was destined to be the first and greatest achievement of his Government. That it could not maintain itself on this level was not its own fault.

It was not, however, in England but in Ireland that Melbourne’s greatest difficulties lay. Ireland’s woes being mainly economic, and concerning the ratio of the population to its means of subsistence, were flatly insoluble by any means that were within the practical politics of that day. No remedy short of a wholesale system of emigration would have done more than “film the surface of the ulcerous place”; and emigration, for which there were

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scant facilities in any case, was encouraged neither by O'Connell nor by the priests. The Whigs set gallantly to work to cope with certain evils which lay on the surface of Ireland's national life, and seemed capable of legislative remedy. They had the support of O'Connell, but Melbourne was under no illusions as to the real motive which underlay the attitude of that astute politician. He resolved in the first place to make Catholic Emancipation a reality, and in so doing brought himself straight up against the Protestant Ascendancy. The Orange Lodges—a very powerful and far-spreading organisation—were dissolved. Amidst endless difficulties and endless squabbles that naturally did no good to the Government in England, Catholics began to obtain a fair share of official patronage. And, especially, the best administrator who ever held office in nineteenth-century Ireland was sent out to Dublin as Under-Secretary, and consistently supported by Melbourne. This was Thomas Drummond, who had gained an intimate knowledge of the country as an officer of Engineers employed on the Ordnance Survey.

Drummond is best remembered by a once famous incident. Certain magistrates of Co. Tipperary demanded special coercive measures from the Government in response to what was certainly a sufficiently barbarous example of agrarian crime. Drummond refused to proceed beyond the ordinary course of law. In an official letter on the subject he wrote a sentence which became historic, and was never forgiven him by the class to which it was addressed. "Property," he said, "has its

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duties as well as its rights; to the neglect of those duties in the past is mainly to be ascribed the diseased state of society in which such crimes take their rise"—the magistrates did not dare publish it. But he did far more than perpetrate truisms which the circumstances of Ireland invested with an air of the wildest paradox. He was chiefly instrumental in giving to Ireland the Royal Irish Constabulary; and also the Resident Magistrates—one of whom, thanks to a literary partnership in our own day, has achieved immortality. On Drummond's great scheme for the construction of a state railway system we shall touch later; if it had been effected, some of the worst horrors of the famine of 1847-8 might possibly have been averted.

While administration was to a large extent in Melbourne's hands, legislation was not. Everything was against him here. The Protestant Ascendancy was strong in the Upper House, and had the support of the Crown. O'Connell, in the autumn of 1835, undertook a campaign against the Lords in the North of England and in Scotland, in the course of which he used some remarkable language. He called the Duke of Wellington "a stunted corporal"; he said that Peel "was as full of political and religious cant as any canter that ever canted in this canting world"; but he did not do the Upper House a great deal of harm with audiences who have always preferred that an orator should at least purport to address their reason as well as their feelings. Their association with O'Connell and his followers injured the Government greatly with upper and middle class opinion in England.

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And, indeed, an ally as to whom the *Times* itself inserted some verses which began—

“Scum condensed of Irish bog,  
Ruffian, coward, demagogue.”

and which continued in a manner quite up to this beginning—an ally who retorted by comparing that journal to “a tawdry female who, with rouged cheeks and faded silks, takes the air in the Strand by gas-light,” could hardly have been a source of moral as distinct from material support to any English party.

Ireland’s tithe system, the state of her municipal government, the state of her poor, were all investigated and reported upon in numerous and portly blue-books. As regards her poor, the revelations of the Commissioners shocked English opinion. Their recommendations, indeed, were not held to be feasible, and further enquiries were made; legislation, more or less on the English model, was accordingly postponed until 1838; but this was not due to Tory opposition. It was otherwise with the tithe system. The Whigs’ plan was, broadly speaking, to stabilise the tithe itself, to diminish its amount, and to make it a charge on the landlord instead of the tenant. They undertook the matter at once; until it was settled there would be small hope of tranquillity among the Irish peasants.

Melbourne introduced the Government’s scheme in a speech which was elaborately prepared, conceived in the “grand manner,” and adorned with some embellishments that were permitted to a parliamentary orator in those days. He quotes Burke: “Our Empire in India is an awful thing.”

Nor could he refrain from an allusion to his beloved classics, finding a parallel to what had in the past been the spirit of the Protestant Ascendancy in the account given by Herodotus of the Egyptian expedition of Cambyses. The Persian King, we are told by the Father of History, did several mad deeds in the course of that campaign, but what conclusively proved him to have been mad himself was the fact that, though desirous of establishing his power in Egypt, he actually insulted the religion of the people. Otherwise the speech, if somewhat quiet in tone for fighting purposes, was businesslike enough, comprising a temperate exposure of the worst absurdities of the Irish Church, a warm plea for charity as between Protestant and Catholic, and an appeal to the House of Lords to do all that in them lay to render Ireland a contented member of the British Empire. The question was fiercely debated, for, since the Whigs had declared that the question could not be satisfactorily solved except on the basis of "appropriation," it touched the whole principle of the inalienability of ecclesiastical endowments. But it was of no avail; the House of Lords would have nothing to say to any arrangement that did not leave the revenues of the Irish Church absolutely untouched; nor would Peel. It was the same again and again. Nothing more dreary, more destitute of any sort of interest for posterity, can be conceived than the debates which raged round this and other Irish questions, session after session, year after year of the second Melbourne administration. The Irish tithe question had to wait until 1838 for settlement; that of the Municipal



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moters could hardly have contemplated. "To show the vanity of all human projects," wrote the Tory Raikes about this time, "sixty rotten boroughs were disfranchised that a few rich individuals might not bias the counsels of the nation, and the result has been, to place in the hands of one factious Irishman a more deadly influence in the House of Commons than all the borough proprietors together under the old system could ever have a chance of possessing." Melbourne, as he confessed to Lord John Russell, felt no confidence about the stability of even so moderate a form of popular government as that which had recently been evolved. He seemed to foresee a fuller measure of democracy,<sup>1</sup> which, ultimately, would "perish from an exaggeration of its own principle." So Melbourne had written in April 1837; two months later, and *à propos* of the impending succession of Queen Victoria, "Nothing will happen," wrote Greville, "because in this country *nothing* ever does." Within a year the "People's Charter" was published. Melbourne's ear had detected certain rumblings underground; bad times had begun again, and produced their normal result—demands for a wide extension of popular representation. The London Working Men's Association was already spreading to the provinces; local associations were forming everywhere; their demands were promulgated in May 1838. Besides Manhood Suffrage, the Ballot, Payment of Members and other points, it had, as is interesting to note, originally been intended to include a demand for

<sup>1</sup>This seems to be what Melbourne meant in his letter in Walpole, *Russell*, I. 280 n.

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woman suffrage in the Chartist manifesto; but this was dropped as premature.

Against such a background as this, pregnant with the future, informed with the hopes, the fears, the energies of multitudes of men, the official politics of those days seem colourless indeed. Nothing, in any case, could make the history of the Whig administration from 1835 onwards interesting to a modern reader. The contentious portions of the programme were mostly concerned with Irish matters that are dust and ashes now; the less contentious portions with matters that seem as dull now as they were absolutely necessary then. The Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees continued their activities, and issued in results which do not appear remarkable now only because we take their existence for granted. The finances of the Church of England had to be placed on some sort of equitable basis; sinecures were suppressed, episcopal revenues more or less equalised, and some new sees created; the Ecclesiastical Commission, begun under Peel, was made into a permanent institution under Melbourne. The Commutation of Tithes, a measure of great importance to agricultural as well as to ecclesiastical interests, was settled. Registration of births, marriages and deaths was instituted. Long-standing grievances of the Nonconformists were removed by opening the Universities to them, abolishing Church rates, and altering the Marriage Laws. Various other anomalies and absurdities were done away with, such as that which deprived prisoners indicted for felony of the aid of counsel. In effect, the achievements of the second Mel-

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bourne administration from first to last, though they owed much to Peel, and under more propitious conditions might have been greater, are writ large in the history of English institutions. And few Governments have been judged less according to what was accomplished, than according to what might have been accomplished if circumstances had been different.

But, we may ask, What part was played in all this by Melbourne himself; what was his personal share in the achievements of his Ministry during its earlier and better days? What was his character as a Prime Minister?

One thing may be asserted with some confidence; no man was ever more disinterested in the exercise of great power, or less amenable to its grosser and subtler temptations. He had also a high sense of his country's greatness, and a high, if unostentatious, sense of his own paramount responsibility for her destinies. He understood human nature, and could display the easiest mastery over affairs which interested him, and especially if they involved the management of men. He had, indeed, many statesmanlike qualities, and stands far from the bottom of the roll of English Prime Ministers. But his warmest admirers never claimed that he was a great statesman. He had come too late to the business; and, in any case, he was not of the stuff of which great statesmen are made. His whole attitude was too detached, his cast of mind too philosophic; to hold judgment in delicate suspense, and to disdain to make converts to one's position, may be the privileges of a philosopher, but hardly of a

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statesman. From the practical point of view it did not matter so much that he initiated nothing, but confined himself to dealing with actual questions as they arose—or, as his critics said, as they were forced upon him. There were others, especially Lord John Russell, who were only too eager to supply his deficiencies in this respect; and, in any case, the main items of the Whig programme had been pretty much laid down beforehand. With foreign politics he was fairly well acquainted, and had an eye for what mattered in that sphere. But he had no great aptitude for financial and economic questions, and it was pre-eminently an age of economic discussion. His colleagues, accordingly, could not as a rule rely upon him for much detailed knowledge of the complex matters with which they were often called upon to deal. Nor was his personality of the dominating kind that might have impressed a distinct character on his Government. But the circumstances of the time were extraordinary. To have fused the incompatible elements of the progressive party into a real whole, to have maintained the enthusiasm of the nation for a reforming policy, would have required a rarer combination of qualities than resided in any statesman of that day—an intenser conviction, a wider vision, a more commanding will. No one less than a Chatham could have done it, and it is interesting to speculate as to what might have happened if a Chatham had arisen in 1830.

But Melbourne had the qualities of his defects in the fullest measure. If he lacked enthusiasm, that made him a better and more disinterested critic of those who were abundantly supplied with

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that commodity. He had, again, asserted himself decisively in the formation of his Government, and, as he showed with Brougham and William IV, he could be firm enough with individuals when he felt strongly, and when he judged that the occasion imperatively required firmness. But he was always too ready to yield to personal pressure, partly no doubt because things which seemed extremely important to others did not always seem so to him. His fibre was not of the toughest, nor his will of the strongest. However, a will of iron is by no means necessarily allied to good-humour, good sense, equity of judgment, and sympathy with others. And, by the general consent of his contemporaries, he showed himself a marvellous composer of differences, ever ready at the service of his party with an inexhaustible fund of patience, kindness and genial profanity. A regard for other people's susceptibilities, the exercise of a constant tact to prevent his Cabinet flying apart into "sparks of liberality and splinters of reform," were what he could and did supply in a sphere where they were much needed. Obstinacy abated before his good-humoured banter; to fussiness, which he particularly detested, he opposed the assumption of a devil-may-care indifference; to fright, the coolest composure. We find him now gently checking Lord John Russell, who seemed to be "teeming with some damned imprudence or other"; now begging an Archbishop "for God's sake to be on his guard against idola, whether of situation or occupation"; now putting some off-hand but searching enquiry to Palmerston; now advising one of his more Radical colleagues, who was proposing to give a piece of his mind to the

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“middle and lower classes,” not to annoy people. Whether the Attorney-General, when he had reason to be dissatisfied with his prospects, was much consoled by receiving a most characteristic letter from the Prime Minister may be doubted; but the letter itself deserves quotation.

“*Windsor Castle,*  
*May 11th, 1839.*”

“MY DEAR ATTORNEY,

With respect to your unwillingness to terminate your career by accepting the office of a puisne judge, that is a matter for your own consideration. If it should be repugnant to your own feelings or those of your friends I shall be sorry; at the same time, for my own part, I do not partake of those feelings. I do not think so much of superiority, pre-eminence, title and position as others are inclined to do. When the Abbé Sieyès, in the early part of the Revolution, went ambassador to Berlin, he was upon some public occasion, either designedly or accidentally, placed in a seat below the dignity of the country he represented. He sat down in it without remonstrance, observing, ‘The first place in this apartment is that which the Ambassador of the French Republic occupies.’ I know not whether this anecdote be true—few anecdotes are so—but I have always admired it; and, depend upon it, wheresoever you may be, you will soon make the seat which you fill equal, if not superior, to the first in the Court.

“Believe me, my dear Attorney,

“Yours ever faithfully,

“MELBOURNE.”

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Though intellectually head and shoulders above the other members of his Government now that Brougham was out of it, Melbourne certainly possessed no such superiority in political experience. He did not accordingly claim, in general, to be more than *primus inter pares*, a chairman with a casting vote. "Strictly speaking," said an unfavourable obituary notice of him in the *Times*, "he never led his party, nor could it be said that he followed them. They possessed his companionship and assistance, without on the one hand ruling him, or on the other submitting to his dictation." But this seems an under-statement of Melbourne's real influence and position. Equable, courteous and good-humoured; sometimes apparently inattentive, but suddenly surprising his colleagues by a stroke of Johnsonian common-sense or an interjected remark which went to the root of the matter in hand, he was, in fact, indispensable to their collective existence. He allowed indeed, and on principle, each of them to go his own way up to the limit imposed by the exigencies of collective Cabinet responsibility. For what was no doubt a temperamental preference he found a precedent in the practice of his master. "Can-ning," he once wrote to Russell, "had no jealousy of anybody, and, as Prime Minister, was content to make each Minister transact his own business, to exercise a general superintendence, and to come forward when he was required. This was the right state of things, and may surely be restored. There are some advantages in doing all yourself, particularly—which is not the case at present—if you have any sulky, refractory, discontented or crochety

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colleagues. Silence and absence are good tests for sulkiness and ill-humour. Adieu."

However, the actual degree of control exercised, or of authority possessed, by a Prime Minister over his Cabinet must always be difficult to estimate. If Melbourne preferred the path of conciliation to that of authority, and was often ready to yield his own opinion to that of his colleagues, it does not therefore follow that he was, for the greater part of his time, a *roi fainéant*. He may have relapsed into that rôle for the last year or two of his administration, but, even then, it does not appear that he shirked the responsibility of decision when it was necessary for him to decide.<sup>1</sup> His supervision, however lightly exercised, appears to have been perfectly efficient, nor does he appear to have in the least neglected the routine work which must presumably form by far the larger part of a statesman's duties. In foreign affairs, especially, he collaborated closely with Palmerston, a somewhat restive colleague. Palmerston's latest biographer speaks of "a daily series of undecipherable notes in that angular handwriting, which tended to begin 'For God's sake don't . . . ' or 'This is rather awkward,' and maintained Melbourne's effortless control of policy and even of Foreign Office drafting."<sup>2</sup> The same impression is made, for example, by his unpublished correspondence with E. J. Littleton (Lord Hatherton), when the latter was Chief Secretary for Ireland—a correspondence which reveals a full acquaintance with the dreary complexities of Irish questions, and a sharp eye kept on what was happening. Nor

<sup>1</sup>See *e.g. Papers*, p. 418.

<sup>2</sup>Guedalla, *Palmerston*, p. 195.



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indeed does it appear that his colleagues, though sometimes and from various points of view finding him deficient, ever seriously questioned his natural capacity for affairs or the soundness of his judgment. Strong common-sense was, as Greville said, Melbourne's distinguishing characteristic as a statesman. He understood and sympathised with the English civic character—its Hellenic aversion to extremes; its respect for Law, but its suspicion of the State; its determined preference for voluntary co-operation as compared with the most symmetrical and consistent schemes of organisation imposed from above. Any projected measure of legislation or policy, if it passed the test of Melbourne's criticism, was pretty certain to be practicable; if it did not pass that test and if, as sometimes happened, he nevertheless yielded to the opinions of others, it was pretty certain to fail. No more can be said of Melbourne as a statesman, and no less.

Above all, however difficult some of his colleagues might be, however they might quarrel among themselves, however they might slight his own warnings and chafe under a caution which was not timidity, he never let them down. William IV might suddenly jib at some proceeding of Palmerston's; Melbourne would hasten to associate himself with the peccant Minister. The King might, again, and very excusably, find fault with the "vacillating and procrastinating" Lord Glenelg at the Colonial Office; Melbourne would reply respectfully protesting against the application of such epithets to a man who was His Majesty's Minister, and stating that he himself was as much

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responsible as Lord Glenelg for the course taken. His colleagues might fail to understand him as well as he understood them. They might be at times puzzled, at times irritated, by the complexities of an unusual character, compact as it was of an intellectual liberalism, a temperamental conservatism, and some irrepressible doubts as to the ultimate tendency of much that he saw going on around him. The more discerning might regret that there was something in him which just prevented his great natural powers from becoming fully effective. The outer circle might not all realise the extent to which circumstances compelled him to steer a devious course—to yield here, to compromise there, to balance advantages, to accommodate incompatible elements. But they stuck to him one and all, and no wonder. On this point we can also cite the testimony of the greatest of Melbourne's nineteenth-century successors, who, by the attraction of opposites, was always drawn to him. Gladstone, fresh from a perusal of the *Melbourne Papers*, signalised his relations with his colleagues (and with his Sovereign) as having been "absolutely perfect."

Assuming that certain things had to be done, that some further reforming legislation had to be passed, that peace and order had to be brought to Ireland, it mattered, in Melbourne's estimation, very little whether they were done by Reformers or by Conservatives. But one thing was a necessity in either case, and his personal and genuine concern for purity and efficiency in administration has never been questioned. It may be true that, as was alleged at the time, Whig nominees tended

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to obtain the lion's share of the posts in the new Civil Service which the legislation of the 'thirties was creating; but this was almost inevitable, and these posts were quite different from the old sinecures. Melbourne himself was never accused of jobbery or nepotism. He bestowed very few peerages, partly from a dislike of Pitt's policy of "making dull country gentlemen duller lords," and partly from an unwillingness to cause vacancies in the Lower House. With titles that did not carry legislative power he was less austere. The Garter, "which had no damned nonsense of merit about it," he frankly desired to use as a means of strengthening his administration, although, considering the jealousies which its bestowal aroused, he found it a double-edged weapon. The sight of a Duke in bad health was, indeed, particularly displeasing to him—"He is not long for this world," he would remark gloomily, "there will then be three lieutenancies to give away, and a ribbon." When the Garter was offered to himself, as it was more than once, he declined it; "A Garter," he once remarked, "may attract to us somebody of consequence whom nothing else can reach, but what is the good of my taking it? I cannot bribe myself." But his humour did not always allow him to be consistent as regards the irrelevance of merit in this connection; "Give *him* the Thistle! God, he'd eat it!" he is reported to have exclaimed on receiving a request from a Scottish peer of limited intelligence. It was the same with baronetcies, of which a great many were bestowed at Queen Victoria's coronation. "I didn't know," he exclaimed, "that anyone cared any longer for these

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sort of things. Now I have a hold on the fools." His own disinterestedness, as he was aware, gave him a great pull in dealing with importunate suitors. He seems to have extracted considerable amusement from the numerous and varied applications he received—applications which, being a connoisseur of human nature, he preserved with a care that he did not always extend to important State papers.

It seems probable that Melbourne himself was the unnamed statesman of this period who, when reproached for not having promoted merit in a particular case, retorted that merit had not promoted *him*. But, if he said this, it was "only his fun." His papers show the greatest conscientiousness about appointments of every kind, and his dislike of jobbery was by no means in accordance with the practice of a party which, he himself considered, "jobbed worse than the Tories." Considering what the Whig tradition was in this respect, it is striking to find Melbourne expressing apprehension at the extent to which birth and connection counted in the fighting services. His care extended even to the Court physicians and chaplains,<sup>1</sup> with whom he was very dissatisfied; such posts should, he thought, provide a means of recognising professional eminence. As regards Civil List Pensions, we find a crisp note addressed to Lord John Russell. "You wrote to me some time ago," he says, "about Cary, the translator of Dante. I have forgiven him his sonnet now, and should have no objection to give him something. The list of applications which I have comprises Mrs. James, widow of the writer

<sup>1</sup>*Letters of Queen Victoria*, I. 156.

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of the Naval History; Leigh Hunt, distinguished writer of seditious and treasonable libels; Colonel Napier, historian of the War in Spain, conceited and dogmatic Radical and grandson of a Duke; Mr. Cary, translator of Dante, madman; Sheridan Knowles, man of great genius, but not old nor poor enough for a pension. Say what you think ought to be done."<sup>1</sup>

But it was his ecclesiastical appointments, matters of great political importance in those days, that gave him the most interest and the most trouble. For the Church of England as an institution Melbourne had a sincere respect; "It was," he often said, "the best Church, the least meddling." As a statesman he was much concerned for, if not exactly what would now be called its efficiency, at any rate for its influence and well-being. "The Whigs," he remarked in 1840, "have always neglected two great powers in their estimate of public opinion; the Church of England and the Pope. Not that I have any reason to speak well of the present Pope," he continued, "he was very rude to me. I wrote to Austin, asking him to give a Cardinal's hat to an Irish Bishop who had been of great use to us in the management of the country, but he took no notice of my request."<sup>2</sup> It is not surprising; but, as regards the Church of England, Melbourne was in a position to make his wishes felt. His ecclesiastical policy was that of a

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 511. Mr. Lloyd Sanders states that the sonnet was one accusing Melbourne of having abandoned Durham.

<sup>2</sup>Anecdote preserved by Houghton. Austin was the un-accredited representative of England at the Vatican; the Bishop was probably Bishop Doyle.

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frank Erastian, who held that the Church was a subordinate, though integral, part of the State, and that it might develop dangerous tendencies if led to regard itself in any other light. This does not seem a point of view that is likely to be revived to-day. However, what was best in its spirit can seldom have received a juster or sincerer expression than Melbourne himself gave it on one occasion, in the course of a long letter to Dr. Pusey. He had not, he explained, seen the new Oxford *Tracts*, but they had been represented to him as inconsistent with the hitherto received doctrines of the Church of England. "I do not myself," he wrote, "dread bold enquiry and speculation. I have seen too many new theories spring up and die away to feel much alarm upon such a subject. If they are founded on truth, they establish themselves and become part of the established belief. If they are erroneous, they decay and perish. . . . I return you my thanks for calling my attention to the general state of religious feeling in the country, and to the deep interest which is taken in religious questions and ecclesiastical appointments. Be assured that I am neither unaware of its extent nor of its fervour, and that I have not been a careless observer of its progress. I doubt not that it is working for good, but the best and most holy aspirations are liable to be affected by the weakness of our nature and to be corrupted by our malignant passions. The danger of religious zeal is the spirit of ill-will, hatred and malice, of intolerance and persecution, which in its own warmth and sincerity it is too apt to engender; a spirit to which, in whatever form or

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place it may show itself, I have a decided antipathy, and will oppose at all hazards all the resistance in my power."<sup>1</sup>

Melbourne's intellectual liberalism had ample opportunity of making itself felt in the ecclesiastical sphere, for it so happened that the mortality among Church dignitaries during his years of office was terrible. "Damn it all," he would say, "another Bishop dead"—adding that he verily believed they died to vex him. It is accordingly not surprising that his first important appointment, that of Dr. Hampden to the Regius Professorship of Divinity at Oxford, savoured of latitudinarianism. Dr. Hampden's piety and learning were unimpeachable, but his orthodoxy was not; nor, apparently, was his discretion, for he seems to have talked of his appointment before it was confirmed. A storm arose; Hampden was bitterly assailed, but Melbourne stuck to his guns. He comforted the afflicted divine; "Be easy," he said, "I like an easy man"; and undertook the defence of the appointment in the House of Lords. "Very few of your Lordships," he justly remarked, "have the means of forming any sound opinion upon such extremely difficult, abstruse and obscure points as these. . . . I know very little of the subject, and yet I believe I know more than those who have opposed the Doctor's nomination."

However, Melbourne was resolved to be rather more careful for the future, and to require for the purpose of high preferment a safe and workable combination of liberalism and orthodoxy. This last requirement was unfortunately not fulfilled

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 505.

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by Dr. Arnold, whom Melbourne greatly admired, though thinking his conduct of his school "rather crotchety." Nor did he regard Sydney Smith, who suffered from an excess of a quality in which the Headmaster of Rugby was deficient, as an eligible candidate for the episcopal bench. His determination to liberalise the Church, so far as he could, was naturally not universally popular. "I always had," he once remarked, "much sympathy with Saul. He was bullied by the prophets just as I have been by the Bishops, who would, if they could, have tied me to the horns of the altar and slain me incontinently." But his appointments were allowed even by their critics to have been made on grounds other than those of birth or connection, and included many names well known in their day. Among them were Dr. Butler, Headmaster of Shrewsbury and grandfather of the author of the *Way of all Flesh*, and Dr. Longley, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury. The most notable man he promoted was Bishop Connop Thirlwall of St. David's, the historian of Greece, "than whom," says Mr. Herbert Paul, "no more commanding intellect had been enlisted in the service of the English Church since the death of Bishop Butler." Thirlwall's independence had driven him from a fellowship at Melbourne's own college, and Melbourne had long had his eye on him.

Thirlwall was summoned from a remote country rectory to see the Prime Minister, whom he found in bed, surrounded with letters and newspapers. "Very glad to see you," said Melbourne, "sit down, sit down, hope you are come to say you



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accept. I only wish you to understand that I don't intend if I know it to make a heterodox Bishop. I don't like heterodox Bishops. As men they may be good anywhere else, but I think they have no business on the bench. I take great interest," he continued, "in theological questions, and I have read a good deal of those old fellows"—pointing to a pile of folio editions of the Fathers—"they are excellent reading and very amusing; some time or other we must have a talk about them. I sent your edition of Schleiermacher to Lambeth, and asked the Primate to tell me candidly what he thought about it, and, look, here are his notes on the margin, pretty copious as you see. He does not concur in all your opinions, but he says there is nothing heterodox in your book."

"Earnestness was his greatest danger," wrote Samuel Butler of Disraeli, "but if he did not quite subdue it (as indeed who can? it is the last enemy that shall be subdued), he managed to veil it with a fair amount of success." Earnestness was also, as we are assured by Lady Palmerston, the essential element of her brother's character; but, if Melbourne was no more able than the later statesman to subdue the enemy entirely, the success with which he veiled the fact was more than fair, it was triumphant. The pains, indeed, which he took to conceal a sufficiently exacting conscientiousness imposed upon the general run of his contemporaries, just as they have imposed upon posterity. "Viscount Melbourne," wrote Sydney Smith with reference to the reforming activities of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, "Viscount Mel-

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bourne declares himself quite satisfied with the Church as it is; but if the public had any desire to alter it, they might do as they pleased. He might have said the same thing of the monarchy, or of any other of our institutions; and there is in the declaration a permissiveness and a good-humour which in public men has seldom been exceeded." It is probable that the language used by the Radicals and the Dissenters, however justifiable, encouraged him in the opposite direction, well aware though he was that the Church had to put her house in order. Sydney Smith, indeed, who knew Melbourne well, was not imposed upon; in the same connection he ventured to "accuse our Minister of honesty and diligence."

None the less, a hatred of anything even remotely resembling cant did undoubtedly lead Melbourne to shock many worthy people. He liked to scent "jobs" everywhere; to describe himself, in response to appeals, as "not a subscribing sort of fellow"; and to appear suspicious of organised benevolence. "The worst of beginning such a book is that it materially interferes with one's attending to anything else," he wrote to Russell about Wilberforce's *Life*; "one good thing, by the way, is that it shows the great philanthropist, Thomas Clarkson, to be a sad fellow."<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to believe, for example, that he liked slavery any more than did other humane people whose incomes

<sup>1</sup>"The allusion is to Clarkson's failure to do justice to his associates in his *History of the Abolition* (Wilberforce, I. 141), and to his wrath with Wilberforce when the latter failed to get his brother promoted in the Navy (II. 39)."—Lloyd Sanders, note to *Papers*, pp. 379–80.

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were not derived in whole or in part from that source. But some—no doubt post-prandial—utterances of his on the topic startled Archbishop Whately, who recorded them in a disquisition on the “Character of Lord Melbourne.” “I say, Archbishop, what do you think I’d have done about this slavery business if I’d had my own way? I’d have done nothing at all! I’d have left it all alone. It’s all a pack of nonsense. Always have been slaves in all the most civilised countries. The Greeks and Romans had slaves. However, they *would* have their way, and so we’ve abolished slavery, but it’s great folly.” No doubt these observations must be considered in the light of Melbourne’s recorded opinion of his interlocutor; “It is impossible,” he once wrote, “to be with the Archbishop of Dublin for ten minutes without perceiving not only that he can do no business, but that no business can be done where he is.” But this would not have been apparent to everybody, and very few indeed would have had the opportunity of reading a brief but weighty memorandum from Melbourne’s pen touching what still remained of the Slave Trade,<sup>1</sup> an iniquity of which he expressed in Parliament the most cordial loathing. His views, again, on popular education seem to have been unprogressive, though, as we shall see, he showed himself ready to support Lord John Russell’s proposals of 1839. But some of his conversational utterances on the subject were painful to hear. “You had better try and do no good, and then you’ll get into no scrapes,” he would say to an earnest young lady who approached him on the

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, pp. 376–7.

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topic—"If you'll only let the children alone, and not be always meddling with them." And again, to the youthful Queen Victoria, who was creditably interested in the subject, "I don't know, Ma'am," he is said to have remarked, "why they make all this fuss about education; none of the Pagets can read or write, and they get on well enough"—alluding to a family whose frequent appearance in high position in the Navy caused him some apprehension.

Melbourne could not, of course, have held his office a month if he had really been an indiscreet man; on the contrary, he was exceedingly prudent as regards anything that mattered. He possessed to the full, as several observers remarked, the statesmanlike faculty of appearing to take people into his confidence, but really telling them nothing that he did not want repeated. None the less, some of his *obiter dicta* probably percolated to less fashionable regions than those in which they were originally uttered, and were hardly calculated to impress those earnest Radicals and stalwart Dissenters on whose support his Government had largely to rely. Nor, since he kept no stable and was seldom seen on a race-course, did he make up with the unregenerate for what he lost with the serious-minded. And this was not all. While anyone, man or woman, in high position or low, found him the easiest person in the world to talk to, there was something in the atmosphere, half-pompous and half-uneasy, of a deputation which aroused his worst instincts. Sometimes, indeed, when the mood was on him, he could carry off anything by virtue of an infectious geniality. To

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him there one day entered a deputation of Dis-senters. After some parley—"Now, sir, you talk like a man of sense," said he to one of them, "it's these damned Anabaptists who do all the mischief." "I'm an Anabaptist," protested a voice. "The Devil you are," retorted the Prime Minister, rubbing his hands and laughing; "well, you have all done a great deal of mischief—and I should like to hear whether you are wiser than the rest." This particular deputation went away in high good-humour; and, indeed, as the teller of the story remarks, he was so obviously good-natured that people in general did not like to take advantage of him when he seemed off his guard. But the results do not always appear to have been so happy. Sydney Smith once depicted Melbourne as receiving a deputation from the Tallow-Chandlers. He would prepare himself most carefully overnight by getting up with his private secretary the whole subject of tallow. But, when he received its representatives, the results of his studies were not in evidence; he would affect the blandest ignorance of them and their business. The Tallow-Chandlers, we may suppose, had never seen the Prime Minister before and were never likely to see him again; they would go away wondering what on earth he was doing at the head of an enlightened and progressive government, or indeed of any government. This sort of thing, though amusing to the sophisticated, could not have been good business; Lord John Russell, years afterwards, told Lecky that Melbourne did the Whigs a good deal of harm by his manner of receiving deputations.

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Melbourne was, in fact, never a popular, still less a national figure; his characteristics, though salient enough to those who knew him, were not such as to strike the public imagination. We like our statesmen to conform to type, and he seemed to conform to no recognised type. However, the solid fact remains that, with all his failings thick upon him, he kept the Whigs together for over six years, and that no one else could have done it. And, as it seems fair to assume, no government could have accomplished the amount of permanently valuable work which his government admittedly did if it had had an inefficient chief.

## CHAPTER VII

### *IN SOCIETY*

These years, until the beginning of 1839, were Melbourne's best. His health was still unimpaired, he was in the fullness of his powers, and his Government was holding its own pretty well. The life which he led, compounded as it was of politics, of the best society of his time, and of the books which he had always loved and never relinquished, was such as is given to few in any generation to realise. Those who only met him once in a way found it hard to believe in the studious habits, the sombre reflectiveness, which accompanied his solitary hours; they would have objected that he did not talk like that, and—if the expression had been then current—that he “did himself too well.” To many of those who saw more of him, who felt that something unusual lay beneath the genial and cynical haunter of London clubs and drawing-rooms, but could not divine what it was, he seemed a mass of contradictions—and, indeed, it is true that he was even less consistent with himself than the general run of humanity. Those who had the capacity and the opportunity for seeing deeper were surprised by the manner in which a strongly individual character had reacted to an early environment which could not have been favourable to the growth of its finer qualities. The society of Melbourne House would hardly have fostered

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the delicacy of feeling which accompanied his occasionally far from delicate conversation: nor would Lady Melbourne's example, though eminently calculated to have advanced his interests in this world, have much encouraged him to speculate as to what lay beyond it. But Melbourne had, all his life, been blessed or cursed with a mind that could not rest on the surface of things, and sought restlessly for those settled convictions which it never appears to have found. A sensitive nature clothing itself with a protective garment of flippancy, a vigorous intellect allied with an indolent and sensuous disposition, a vein of melancholy relieved by displays of high animal spirits—these things may not be uncommon in themselves. More uncommon, probably, is the combination, such as he displayed, of a highly critical and detached intellect with a rough and ready shrewdness, an almost rustic bluntness of speech, that helped to render him the least "superior" of men. In any case, it is a question of degree; Melbourne's was a big temperament, and its contrasting elements were accordingly accentuated.

It is no wonder that he impressed his contemporaries greatly; that, for example, men so different as Archbishop Whately, Greville and Bulwer Lytton were all moved to attempt a regular portrayal of a character of which they felt the enigmatic attraction. Whately merely enlarges on the view that Melbourne, as a statesman, thought with the Tories and acted with the Whigs. Greville, though he saw a good deal of Melbourne, never, as he himself acknowledges, knew him intimately. The elaborate portrait—the most elaborate in his long



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gallery—stresses the apparent inconsistencies of the man as he showed himself in the world of society and politics. Bulwer Lytton, though he had not seen much of Melbourne, had, unlike the other two, seen him in a more intimate aspect; and it is that aspect which he emphasises in *St. Stephen's*.

"In stalwart contrast, large of heart and frame,  
Destined for power, in youth more bent on fame,  
Sincere, yet deeming half the world a sham.  
Mark the rude handsome manliness of Lamb!  
None then foresaw his rise; ev'n now but few  
Guess right the man so many thought they knew;  
Gossip accords him attributes like these—  
A sage good-humour based on love of ease,  
A mind that most things undisturbed'ly weighed,  
Nor deemed the metal worth the clink it made.  
Such was the man, in part, to outward show;  
Another man lay coiled from sight below—

Each metaphysic doubt—each doctrine dim—  
Plato or Pusey—had delight for him.  
His mirth, though genial, came by fits and starts—  
The man was mournful in his heart of hearts.  
Oft would he sit or wander forth alone;  
Sad—why? I know not; was it ever known?  
Tears come with ease to those ingenuous eyes—  
A verse, if noble, bade them nobly rise.  
Hear his discourse, you'd think he scarcely felt;  
No heart more facile to arouse or melt,  
High as a knight's in some Castilian lay,  
And tender as a sailor's in a play."

It is a striking portrait, like so many others in that unjustly forgotten poem. But the lights and shadows seem too strong; Melbourne's melancholy was that of Johnson, not of Byron. We may indeed well believe that he never ceased to be haunted by memories, but the tragic background of his earlier

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life had receded by this time. His afflicted son survived until well on into the 'thirties, but he must have grown resigned to his state, and though deeply attached to him, did not affect to regard his death, when it came, as anything but a release. He was then even freer to enjoy a completely detached existence, and to extract what pleasure he could from it following the doctrines ascribed to Epicurus. To most people he seemed to extract a great deal. "In social pleasure, ill exchanged for power," he showed himself at the top of any company—whether at Brooks', the newly-founded Reform Club, or at Bowood and such other country houses as met with his approval; or, again, in the boudoirs and drawing-rooms of his numerous feminine friends. Almost everything he said, it was remarked, seemed perfectly natural and yet quite original. A large, lounging, debonair figure, with a keen and kindly eye, and a singularly mobile and sensitive mouth, he seemed to combine the respective qualities of Major Pendennis and Dr. Folliott—the mellow worldly sense of the one with the classical aroma and the frank prejudices of the other—a combination which was rendered all the more piquant by abrupt flashes of eccentric and whimsical humour, or sudden withdrawals into silence and abstraction.

"The worst of the present day," he said to a friend in 1835, "is that men hate one another so damnably. For my part I love them all." This was probably said in the evening, and, indeed, Melbourne's observations after he had dined were always apt to assume a different complexion from his considered and matutinal opinions. His love of his fellow-men was, it must be confessed, grounded largely

on not expecting too much of them ; in this respect, as in others, he differed from the Radical intellectuals. However, he could warm towards the most unlikely people, provided that they were capable of ideas, and were not always worrying him to put those ideas into practice. Sydney Smith used to relate how, on one occasion, he carried off Jeremy Bentham from Holland House to Kensington Church, and drilled the philosopher through the service. He had also, as we have seen, befriended Godwin in a very practical manner. Again, though he thought Owen's doctrines moonshine, and genially told him to his face that he was one of the most foolish men he had ever met, Melbourne rather liked him personally. He conceived, very justly, that Owenite socialism was not likely to prove a revolutionary force in England, and failed, moreover, to see why a gentleman need be prevented from entering his Sovereign's presence by reason of any opinions that he happened to hold.<sup>1</sup> He accordingly himself presented Owen to what the *Quarterly Review* called the "unsuspecting innocence of a virgin Queen"—to the horror of Liberals, Conservatives, polite society generally and ministers of all denominations.

Yet, throughout all the distractions of politics and society, he somehow managed to preserve his inner life, and to be often alone with his books and his thoughts. We do not know at what time he began to develop the extraordinary appetite for theology which we have found him confessing to Bishop Thirlwall ; but it had become his main interest in his later years. The subject had not

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, p. 409.

then been brightened and popularised in volumes of a moderate size and a literary flavour; nor had it called to its aid psychology and anthropology; it still retained much of its pristine austerity. Melbourne devoured quartos and folios, with results that astonished the most diverse people. M. Van de Weyer, the Belgian Minister, was much impressed by his knowledge of the Gallican controversy and the part played therein by Bossuet. In 1840—so old are our controversies—the question arose of revising the Prayer Book, and the Bishop of Lincoln was doubtless astonished to receive a letter from “the lax and dissolute Melbourne” on that subject—a letter which instructed him as to the motives and action of Tillotson in a somewhat similar situation in 1689, as to those of “Calamy and the leading Dissenters,” as to exactly what happened, and why it happened.

Haydon found him one day engaged with a Greek Testament that had belonged to Dr. Johnson. The following dialogue ensued—“Is not the world, Lord Melbourne, an evidence of perpetual struggle to remedy a defect?” “Certainly,” he mused out. “If, as Milton says, we were sufficient to have stood, why then did we fall?” Lord Melbourne rose bolt upright: “Ah,” he said, “that’s touching on all our apprehensions.” In what did it all issue? His friends often wondered, and Melbourne would have been the last person to have enlightened them. Perhaps he himself would have found it hard to render account of a mind that was divided against itself—a sceptical intelligence allied, as it seems to have been, with a craving for certitude. At Holland House, indeed, his conversa-

tion was that of one who had studied Gibbon to some purpose, and especially relished the fifteenth chapter of the *Decline and Fall*; it was also that of a Minister who had a very quick eye for the foibles of human nature, and the disposal of considerable ecclesiastical patronage. But, however he might talk in the society of his equals, he had, as he showed with the young Queen Victoria, a genuine abhorrence of saying anything to sap the faith of simple minds, or of puzzling untutored folk by raising perplexing questions.<sup>1</sup> At times, again, we catch a tone in him which was strangely at variance with his ordinary manner, and indicated a depth of seriousness, and even of conviction, which he preferred as a rule to dissemble. He surprised his colleagues one day when a proposal of Palmerston's for strengthening our fleet against Russia was under discussion. He considered, he said quite seriously, that England had been under the special protection of Divine Providence at certain periods of her history, as, for example, at the time of the Spanish Armada, and of the retirement of the French squadron from Bantry Bay. We find him, again, lending a copy of Alexander Knox's *Remains* to a friend, with the remark, "I do not approve his condemnation of Fénelon and those whom he is pleased to term mystics, to which persuasion I belong." It was a leaning natural, perhaps, to a mind conscious of its own solitariness, and, in its reflective hours, penetrated by a sense of "the mysteriousness of our present being."

"I have read," he once said of himself in his younger days, "too much and too little. So much

<sup>1</sup>See especially *Papers*, p. 395.

that it has extinguished all the original fire of my genius, and yet not enough to furnish me with the power of writing books of mature thinking and solid instruction." It was a modest—a far too modest—judgment, and characteristic of the man. But there is, fortunately, another way of contributing to the happiness and even to the wisdom of mankind; and, if Melbourne did not write, he talked. It was indeed the universal opinion of his contemporaries that he could not possibly have written as well as he talked, and that his intimate conversance with what was best in the literature of several languages had not impaired his surprising and refreshing command of the native vernacular. To Holland House especially he would often resort, and astonish a circle, whose serious business in life was conversation, with the variety and pungency of his own.

Holland House is unique in our history. It has been described often enough, with its urbane though gouty master who was the nephew of the canonised Fox; its capricious and arbitrary mistress who could not be received at Court owing to the circumstances of her marriage, and used to send delicacies to Napoleon at St. Helena; its librarian, Allen, who prided himself on his atheism and loved to argue with Melbourne on religion; Luttrell, the polished versifier and man about town; Rogers, who combined the intermittent practice of poetry with a cynical and immensely experienced outlook on men and things; and the unofficial chaplain of the house, Sydney Smith, to whom the Whigs, "out of pure cowardice," Melbourne used to say, did not dare to give higher clerical preferment than a canonry of St. Paul's. Around this nucleus there

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congregated, for thirty years and more, successive generations of Whig politicians, distinguished foreigners, men of letters, men of learning and, to some extent, men of science. The distinction of Holland House lay in its combination of the Parisian salon with the great political house. One of its functions was of considerable importance. The Whig chiefs had never welcomed new men gladly, less so than the Tories; one of them, for example, "thanked God that they were not private tutors, like Sir Robert Peel." But at Holland House brilliant though unconnected recruits like Horner and Macaulay were welcomed, introduced into the great world, and finally captured for the party. Macaulay, in his essay on Lord Holland, has described the process rapturously. But we may suspect that most neophytes would have taken a long time to feel at ease on the Whig Zion; the atmosphere of hard intellectual brilliance must have been overwhelming; and the perpetual presence of the latest thing in geniuses or ambassadors must have led to a vast deal of talking for display.

The chief pillars of Holland House, for all their familiarity with great affairs and great interests, were curiously limited in outlook, and quite unrepresentative of general English sentiment. On the vital question of the war they had had the sense of their fellow-countrymen against them, and had shrunk into a contemptuous exclusiveness. Fox indeed, who had nominally set the tradition, was English enough himself in spite of his Napoleonic sympathies; in his openness, his warmth of feeling, and his carelessness of consistency he was, moreover, an eminently human and

appealing figure. But his enthusiasm for all humane and liberal causes had become frigid and doctrinaire as interpreted by less rich and genial natures. To him, in particular, may be traced the odd streak of academic republicanism which chequered the aristocratic Whiggery of Lord Holland, and was not incompatible with a cordial dislike of Radicals in the flesh. The self-satisfaction of the Holland House circle was sublime. Acutely conscious as they were of possessing superior intelligences, they cherished the utmost contempt for ordinary people; the host himself, it was said, tended to regard mankind "with the eyes of a naturalist rather than of a brother." Of the profane fraction of England which lay beyond Kensington turnpike and the park railings of a few country houses they—or most of them—remained in contented ignorance. Sydney Smith, a country parson for part of the year, let in some fresh air; otherwise, no boisterous breeze from the village, the market-place, the farmers' ordinary, or the hunting-field ruffled their cultured discussions. Nor did any dull cry from the newer England of the factory and the mine disturb their serene belief in the sufficiency of orthodox Whig philosophy. Melbourne had no such complacency, and was conscious of a wider world. He neither had, nor affected to have, any expansive enthusiasms. But, though not in advance of his time as regards the "social problem," he was at least aware of its existence. Nothing surprised him more, he told the Lords in 1839, "than the firm and steady good sense of the great majority of the people, exposed as they were to the most violent representations, to the most severe tempta-



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tions, suffering under great grievances, and told that the common cause of all their grievances was to be found in the maladministration of the country, which might be easily remedied."

While he doubted occasionally about Holland House and tired of its perpetual political chatter, Melbourne always loved to go there. His conversation betrayed an amount of reading which amazed his hearers. Greville provides us with a sample. "After dinner," he writes under date September 7th, 1834, "there was much talk of the Church, and Allen spoke of the early reformers, the Catharists, and how the early Christians persecuted one another. Melbourne quoted Vigilantius' letter to Jerome, and then asked Allen about the 11th of Henry IV, an Act passed by the Crown against the Church, and referred to the dialogue between the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely at the beginning of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, which Lord Holland sent for and read, Melbourne knowing it all by heart and prompting all the time. . . . About etymologies, Melbourne quoted Tooke's *Diversions of Purley*, which he seemed to have at his fingers' ends." Hatherton, again, records an occasion when the Prime Minister was in particularly good form. During dinner, he was observed to be exchanging "much jocose conversation" with a sister of Mrs. Norton's; after dinner he engaged on "a most learned, but not very religious" conversation with Holland and Allen on the Biblical account of the origin of nations. But what astonished Hatherton most was his extraordinary acquaintance with the literature, light or solid, "British, European or American," of the preceding six years

during which he had been in office. It was strange, the diarist reflected, that "the two best read men in high life in England should be the leaders of the two Houses of Parliament"—the other being, of course, Lord John Russell.

However wide Melbourne's reading may have been, his literary standards remained those of the eighteenth century; his soul was not attuned to the poetry of the Romantics. Keats and Shelley he never mentions; in any case, it would probably have been too late for him to have acquired fresh tastes in poetry. As Prime Minister he was prepared to sanction the grant of a liberal pension to Wordsworth; but "as a critic" he could not agree to its being coupled with a recognition of Wordsworth as the first of living poets; "there must," he said, "be a protestando to this effect in the grant."<sup>1</sup> The *Waverley* novels he admired immensely, judging *Old Mortality*, *Quentin Durward*, *The Fair Maid of Perth* and *Kenilworth* to be the best; of Scott's poetry he was also fond. But we regret to learn that there was something about Scott himself which he did not quite like,<sup>2</sup> "a sneaking, flattering, sycophantical manner"; and that he considered "Scott's conduct with regard to the *Beacon* by no means open and fair." Though, again, he had a cultivated interest in painting, he was not inclined to afford it any Government encouragement. The unfortunate Haydon, in whose diary he is frequently and favourably mentioned, talked to him a great deal on the subject, but got little satisfaction. No doubt,

<sup>1</sup>*Torrens*, p. 423.

<sup>2</sup>*Lee's Diary*, p. 26. For the *Beacon* affair see *Lockhart*, chap. 54.

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in unimportant matters such as the Fine Arts, the Prime Minister felt himself more especially bound to reflect public opinion.

With the rising generation, the men who were young in the middle and later 'thirties, he liked to keep in touch. We may be sure that he made himself most agreeable, and listened to them with a smile of which the infinite indulgence was well known to his friends. They appear to have given him some food for thought. In particular, they seemed to have too much religion, or too little; if they came from Oxford, they were imbibing doctrines that were of a Romanising tendency, and subversive of the eminently satisfactory compromise embodied in the Establishment. In other respects also there were signs of a curious interest in the Middle Ages, a bigoted and most uncomfortable period beyond which he had hoped and thought we had finally passed; a preoccupation with the idea of a "merrie England" which was supposed, and quite erroneously, to have existed at some former period; a newfangled Toryism which had somehow got itself involved with ecclesiastical architecture and the cult of the maypole. The literary admirations of the young men were also strange; if they came from Cambridge, they appeared to be devotees of the poetry of Mr. Wordsworth. If they came from neither Oxford nor Cambridge, but were advanced thinkers, well, by all means let them be; but that was no reason why they should fail in a decent outward respect to institutions which were bound to go on anyhow; no doubt these institutions were in some respects absurd, but then so was human nature.

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One young man in particular whom Melbourne met one day at dinner seems to have both surprised and impressed him; he conformed to no usual type either in his appearance, or his conversation, or his mode of dress. This was Mr. Disraeli, just back from the East. Melbourne good-naturedly turned the conversation on the countries which Disraeli had recently been visiting. "Your Lordship," Disraeli remarked, "appears to have derived all your notions of Oriental matters from the Arabian Nights Entertainments." "And a devilish good source too," replied Melbourne, rubbing his hands and laughing. Later on, when Disraeli confessed to political ambitions, Melbourne asked him if he would like to be private secretary to a Minister. The young man modestly confessed that he would rather be a Minister himself, and, indeed, that his ultimate object was the Premiership. "And I wish you may get it," Melbourne replied. Years later, it is said, he had occasion to remark, "By God, I believe he'll do it after all."<sup>1</sup>

Feminine companionship, no less than masculine, was a necessity of Melbourne's nature; his women friends were numerous and various at all times of his life; and it was in this region that he appears to have derived least aid from philosophy, or even theology. However, no breath of scandal touched his friendship with the Hon. Emily Eden, a well-known figure in mid-Victorian London, and

<sup>1</sup>Houghton, Hayward and Torrens, p. 274 and *n.*, are in conflict about the details. Torrens makes Melbourne tell Disraeli quite seriously that he had no chance, for Stanley was to be the next Premier! The versions of this famous conversation can, in fact, easily be reconciled.

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the author of two good novels which have lately been republished. She was the confidante of his theological speculations,<sup>1</sup> and hoped that all his reading and reflection had turned him into the right way, but Greville at any rate could see no symptoms of that in his after-dinner conversation. To her Melbourne was in the habit of sending theological works profusely annotated by his own hand, and accompanied by short notes. Miss Eden, the gossips said, would not have been indisposed to become Lady Melbourne; but when she departed for India to keep house for her brother, Lord Auckland, she had to be content with a note expressive of Melbourne's affectionate sentiments, and a beautiful copy of Milton. "My mother," he wrote, "always told me I was very selfish, man and boy, and I believe she was right. I always find some excuse for not doing what I am anxious to avoid. I cannot bear to come and bid you good-bye, for few events of my life have been so painful to me as your going. May God bless and keep you."

No doubt other ladies also would have been glad to console the widowed Prime Minister, but it is hardly surprising that hope never so far triumphed over experience as to lead him to marry again. If charged, as he sometimes was, with a too frequent admiration of those whom others had married, he might have replied, with Mr. Carter of the *Dolly Dialogues*, that it would have been strange indeed if somebody had not married those whom he admired. He had certainly embarked during these

<sup>1</sup>Greville, 2nd ser., 3. 138; the name in the MS. is given under a transparent cipher. The note (B.M. Add. 38855/236) quoted on p. 204 *ante*, is unaddressed, but was no doubt to her.

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years on a friendship with one particular married lady which was to cause him a very great deal of trouble in 1836.

When Melbourne was tired of books, large dinner-parties, and the ruthless talk of Holland House, there was open to him a very modest dwelling in Storey's Gate; it was the home of the Hon. George Norton and his wife, *née* Caroline Sheridan. Mrs. Norton was only twenty-eight at this time; since she died in 1877, she must be remembered by persons still living. Melbourne had, some years before, appointed Norton a metropolitan police magistrate; but his interest, originally invoked on behalf of the gentleman, became speedily concentrated on the lady. She was then well known as a fluent writer of Byronic verse, and, later on, as a spirited and eloquent champion of a woman's right to the custody of her children in certain circumstances. One of three beautiful sisters, granddaughters of Sheridan, with all the wit, cleverness and charm that befitted her ancestry, she had been drawn, when very young, into a *mariage de convenance* with a man in whom she could find nothing to respect. Seeing that she combined a disregard for convention with eyes, eyelashes and a complexion that dazzled at any rate all masculine beholders, married ladies did not invariably approve of her; their husbands liked her better; their children also, we are told, adored her. Melbourne, on his way back from Whitehall, used to drop in of an evening, and find her in a tiny drawing-room, which consisted principally of a sofa, and was littered with drawing crayons, books and papers. The family were not well off; Mrs. Norton's

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position was such that a powerful friend was welcome to her; and also, being addicted to political intrigue in a small way, she liked to fancy herself behind the scenes. Melbourne no doubt saw something in her that reminded him of what his own Caroline had been in her happier hours, admired the way in which she kept her home together for the sake of her children, and sympathised with her in domestic troubles that bore some resemblance to what his own had been. For matrimonial difficulties had overtaken Mr. and Mrs. Norton; it is not probable that Mrs. Norton was wholly blameless therein, but such evidence as we have is decidedly against her husband. That these troubles were in no way due to Melbourne himself, that Norton had never in the least objected to the Prime Minister's frequent visits to his house, seems certain;<sup>1</sup> and, as is quite evident, Melbourne himself never thought that he was exposing Mrs. Norton to anything worse than the sort of gossip about which she would not have cared in the least. He was accordingly astounded when, in the spring of 1836, Norton served him with a writ, and withdrew his children from his wife's custody.

Melbourne, whose feelings were warm and whose conscience was sensitive when it was a question of injuring other people, did not affect to regard the matter lightly. His anxiety, as testified in letters to Mrs. Norton which are not those of guilt, made him ill for some time. He bade her be of good heart; "You know," he wrote, "that what is alleged (if it be alleged) is utterly false, and what is false can rarely be made to appear true." This was a different

<sup>1</sup>See Perkins, *Life of Mrs. Norton*, p. 88.

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matter altogether from a case in which he had been involved some years before. That case had been non-suited, and if the veracious Mr. Creevey may be believed, the proceedings, so far as they went, could hardly have been such as to inflict grievous injury on anyone concerned. But Mrs. Norton's position was a cruel one. She was without resources save for what she could make by her pen; if the verdict went against him, the outlook for her, and for the children in whom she was wrapped up, was black indeed. Shortly before the matter came into court we find him writing to her :

*South St., June 9th, 1836.*

"I have received your letter, and have given such instructions as I trust will be for the best. I do not wonder at the impression made upon you. I knew it would be so, and therefore I was almost unwilling to have the interview take place at all. All the attorneys I have ever seen have the same manner : hard, cold, incredulous, distrustful, sarcastic, sneering. They are said to be conversant in the worst part of human nature, and with the most discreditable transactions. They have so many falsehoods told them that they place confidence in none.

"I have sent your note, having read it. I dare say you think me unfeeling, but I declare that since I first heard I was proceeded against I have suffered more intensely than I ever did in my life. I had neither sleep nor appetite, and I attributed the whole of my illness (at least the severity of it) to the uneasiness of my mind. Now what is this uneasiness for? Not for my own character, because, as you justly say, the imputation upon me is as



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nothing. It is not for the political consequences to myself, although I deeply feel the consequences that my indiscretion may bring upon those who are attached to me or follow my fortunes. The real and principal object of my anxiety and solicitude is you, and the situation in which you have been so unjustly placed by the circumstances which have taken place.”<sup>1</sup>

He informed the King that he was ready to resign. But the King, though he hated the Whigs, would have been glad of a change of Government, and did not love Melbourne, suspected a plot, and stoutly refused to hear of anything of the kind. “People may discuss,” he said, “the public acts of my Ministers as much as they please, but I will never countenance an attempt of any party to turn to its advantage an error of conduct of this description. We have all had our faults in this way.” The Duke of Wellington, from the side of the Opposition, made haste to assure Melbourne that he saw no reason for such a step, adding that if Melbourne relinquished office he would not himself take part in any government that might in consequence be formed. Meanwhile, Melbourne was going about with looks of extreme dejection, the object of universal attention. But, a few days before the case came on, a friend observed a change for the better in his appearance. He seemed to have had some reassuring news.

*Norton v. Melbourne* was, needless to say, a *cause célèbre*; couriers, charged to convey to the chief capitals of Europe news of a verdict which might

<sup>1</sup>Complete letter given in Perkins, p. 93, partly in Torrens.



THE HON. MRS. NORTON

*(From a stipple engraving by Thomson after a drawing by Sir George Hayter.)*



have international consequences, were stationed outside the court. The curious may find the case reported at quite sufficient length in the *Times* of June 23rd, 1836; but, in order to prevent possible disappointment, it may be as well to state that its details are not sensational, or even interesting. In one particular, however, it influenced the even more famous case of *Bardell v. Pickwick*, which was recorded only a few months afterwards. The highest expectations had been formed of some letters which were alleged to have been found in Mrs. Norton's desk. They would show, it was rumoured, that the Prime Minister had been unduly influenced by her in the disposal of Government patronage—the well-informed did not believe a word of it. As regards Melbourne's letters to the lady, it certainly appeared in the course of the evidence that he had lent her Dr. Lardner's *Letters on some Jewish Errors with respect to the Conversion of Mary Magdalene*. Otherwise, all that could be produced were three short notes, as to which the plaintiff's Counsel remarked that, while they afforded no proof of guilt, "There was something in them which may aid you, gentlemen of the jury, in forming an opinion as to the nature of the intercourse which then existed between the parties." The notes ran as follows:—(i) "I shall call about half-past four or five"; (ii) "How are you? I shall not be able to come to-day, I probably shall to-morrow"; (iii) "No house to-day. I shall call after the levee about four or half-past. If you wish it later, let me know. I will then explain about going to Vauxhall"; the signature being in each case "Yours, Melbourne."

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Melbourne had entrusted his case to Sir John (afterwards Lord) Campbell, his Attorney-General, who, later on, diminished his claim on his client's gratitude by giving his speech in *Norton v. Melbourne* the place of honour in a volume of his collected speeches. Campbell, in a private letter to his brother, avowed his personal belief in the truth of his client's protestations as to the innocent character of his relations with Mrs. Norton. None the less, he said that the importance of the case was such that it caused him more anxiety than any that he had ever been entrusted with. However, it turned out that the case he had to meet was flimsy in the extreme, resting entirely on the evidence of discharged servants, and relating entirely to events that were alleged to have occurred a considerable time before. Campbell, before calling his own evidence, was practically invited by the jury to deal with the plaintiff's case as already submitted. He had no difficulty in demolishing it, and in driving home the gross improbability of the charge. The Judge while leaving the issue fairly to the jury, told them that there was no evidence that Norton's action in separating himself from his wife when he did had been due to any suspicion of her conduct; the jury found for the defendant without leaving the box; even those who were most anxious for the success of the prosecution left the court agreeing that the charge could not be sustained.

William IV congratulated Melbourne handsomely on having baffled an attack which, he had no doubt, was due to "the meaner animosities of party." It is impossible to believe that the action

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was a *bona fide* one. No one indeed accused any responsible and reputable member of the Opposition of having had any hand in the affair; none the less, it was generally believed at the time that some of the baser sort were at the bottom of it. Norton, a lawyer himself, must have known that he had no case; he is stated to have admitted in writing later on that he believed his wife to have been innocent; though, when an endeavour was made to produce this letter in some subsequent proceedings that occurred between them, it was disallowed.<sup>1</sup> As for Melbourne, we can only add that he left behind him a statement, to be read after his death, in which he made a solemn declaration of Mrs. Norton's innocence.

It was, from the nature of the case, but little that he could do to repair some inevitable consequences to Mrs. Norton. The manner in which that high-spirited if indiscreet lady conducted herself in a trying position gives us a good opinion of her. Feeling acutely that she had not been satisfactorily vindicated by a verdict which was concerned only with the question of damages to Mr. Norton, and having some evidence on her side which had not been produced at the trial, she naturally desired to carry the matter further. But Melbourne, who had at that time very special reasons for deprecating any revival of the matter, begged her not to do so. She acquiesced, but with some bitter feelings. Melbourne had not been prevented by the late painful episode from becoming the intimate adviser of the young girl who was now Queen of England, while she was "hunted and haunted through life

<sup>1</sup>See Perkins, p. 125.

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with a scandal involving two persons, but seemingly admitting of only one acquittal." And, what must have turned the knife in the wound, Melbourne felt constrained to advise her not to seek presentation at Court so long as the new Queen remained unmarried; she accordingly had to wait until Prince Albert's advent rendered Queen Victoria invulnerable, and enabled her to achieve complete social rehabilitation. None the less, she and Melbourne remained friends, and when, years afterwards, Melbourne was an old and stricken man, we shall meet Mrs. Norton again.

William IV, though he had behaved exceedingly well to Melbourne in the Norton business, continued as hostile as ever to the Government. He would occasionally relent, and ask his Ministers, after a Council meeting, to dine with him and "drink two bottles of wine a man"; but as a rule he would only see them when absolutely necessary. His moods were becoming impossible; it was about this time that he made a frightful scene with the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria at his own dinner-table. With the Duchess indeed, who had so lamentably failed in her duty of providing a male heir to the throne, he had always been on bad terms. He did not like her taking her daughter on a series of progresses up and down the kingdom. And, more important, she differed from him as to the quarter in which a husband might most suitably be found for the Princess; she, naturally enough, favoured the House of Coburg, while he was for the House of Orange; and she had, quite recently, refused to visit Windsor with her daughter and meet the young Orange princes.

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But the peppery old man was not destined to worry his Ministers and his sister-in-law much longer. At the beginning of May 1837 he fell ill, and those behind the scenes, though not as yet the general public, saw reason to believe he had not long to live. Melbourne had some acquaintance with the Duchess of Kent; she called herself a Whig, and had brought up her daughter to regard the Whigs as her friends. But of the Princess Victoria he knew next to nothing; no one had been allowed to speak to her save in her mother's presence. The Duchess does not seem to have been a very wise woman; her "extreme indiscretion," and that of her adviser, was remarked upon by a competent observer only a few days before the King's death. However, she had certainly been anxious to do her best for her daughter according to her lights; in particular, she had had sense enough to keep her away from the Court so far as possible, and to give her a quiet and simple upbringing. The Princess's life had been a secluded one, no doubt. But even a small society may offer plenty of human nature for the inspection of observant eyes; nor is there any reason to suppose that the Princess, who was fond of making vigorous if crude pencil sketches of people she came across, was unobservant. It would, indeed, be absurd to imagine that there were any lurid depths hidden under the placid surface of her daily life at Kensington. Still, human nature is apt to show some of its less lovely attributes in circumstances such as those which surrounded her—a few people, living under one roof, irresistibly tempted to play for a high stake, for the greatest share of influence over a



young girl who was to become, and perhaps very soon, Queen of England.

The circle at Kensington Palace was presided over by two persons, or more probably by one, since the Duchess' Comptroller and general adviser appears to have obtained some sort of an ascendancy over her. This Sir John Conroy, unless he is very much maligned, was a man who ought never to have been allowed to occupy any such position; he seems at the least to have been a blustering sort of fellow, much too talkative, and with an inflated idea of his situation and its possibilities. Things had not gone happily of recent times; the Princess had become estranged from her mother, and had come to detest Conroy and his influence over her; there had lately been a lady-in-waiting, Madame de Späth, who had been dismissed because of Conroy. There was also the Princess's governess, the determined and discreet Baroness Lehzen, who hated Conroy and the Duchess, and was resolved not to lose, if she could help it, the confidence which she had already won from her pupil. In the offing was the King, kindly disposed towards his niece, but making no attempt to conceal his feelings towards the Duchess of Kent, and praying that he might survive the Princess's coming of age, and so obviate the necessity for a Regency. A long way off, but in constant touch by letter, was King Leopold of Belgium, the Princess' favourite uncle, and her prudent though not wholly disinterested mentor. And, directly she attained her legal majority (May 24th, 1837) the famous Baron Stockmar was despatched by Leopold to be at her side. Formerly Leopold's physician in old days at Claremont,

Stockmar had risen to be his trusted counsellor and an unofficial diplomatist of the first importance. Able, like a greater countryman of his, to "hold his tongue in six languages"; content to work unseen and to wield a great influence in a manner unknown to all save a few, he had been commissioned to advise Princess Victoria on behalf of her uncle, and to prepare the way for Leopold's project of marrying her to his favourite nephew, Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. He would also, Leopold hoped, assist her in extending her education, in the directions of "(1) History, considered in a practical and philosophical way; (2) International Law and everything connected with it; (3) Political Economy, an important branch nowadays; (4) Classic Studies; (5) *belles lettres* in general; (6) Physical Science in all its branches, etc., etc."—in all of which subjects Stockmar was a walking encyclopædia.

There were, in fact, all the elements of an interesting situation gathering around the Princess towards the middle of 1837. The Duchess of Kent had been appointed Regent in the event of the King's dying before her daughter came of age; the King was seriously ill; the Princess was on the eve of attaining her majority; Conroy and the Duchess saw themselves on the point of sinking into utter insignificance. Were they prepared to yield without a struggle? Those behind the scenes had reason to believe that sundry untoward incidents occurred at this juncture. The reports of them were doubtless exaggerated even in the limited circulation to which they attained, but they agreed in crediting the Princess with a great deal of spirit. A pension

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of four thousand a year on the Privy Purse and a peerage, it was said, had been promised to Conroy on her accession; but, when the King's state became alarming and the Princess was informed of this arrangement, she refused to pledge herself in any way. She was thereupon confined to her room; but managed to get a note out by a confidential servant to be delivered to the first peer who called at the Palace. This was Lord Liverpool, who remonstrated with the Duchess, and secured the release of the Princess.<sup>1</sup> A far more sensational story was told many years later to Greville, which also mentioned some attempted coercion of the Princess. Briefly stated, it comes to this. The Duchess of Kent and Conroy endeavoured to get a regency established for some time after the prospective death of the King, alleging that this course was desired by the Princess herself, on the ground of her extreme youth and inexperience. Melbourne was at first inclined to listen to the proposal. But when Stockmar, whom nothing escaped, went to him and denounced the whole thing as a plot engineered by Conroy without the knowledge or consent of the Princess, Melbourne was "struck all of a heap."

Such is the story that Stockmar told Lord Granville, who told it to Greville in 1854. Not much reliance can be placed on the details of a statement made seventeen years after the event, and taken down at second hand. That Melbourne would have been caught unawares even for a moment in a

<sup>1</sup>Hatherton (Sept. 1st, 1839) heard this from Lord Ravensworth, Lady Normanby's father. For the other story see the new *Greville* (edited by Mr. Whitwell Wilson), II. 8.

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matter of this kind is not likely; and we may be sure that, before committing himself to any decisive step, he would have taken every possible precaution. But that something happened to heighten the young girl's consciousness of the ambitions and jealousies, the hopes and the fears, which were focussed upon herself; something perhaps which compelled her to assert herself strongly against her natural protectors—this seems probable enough. A hint of it appears in her correspondence. "You have had some little difficulties," wrote King Leopold to the Princess under date May 25th, 1837, "of which I am completely in the dark." In her own opinion at any rate, as she told him directly after her accession, she "had, alas! seen so much of bad hearts and dishonest and double minds."<sup>1</sup>

However this may be, the plot, if there was one, was absolutely unknown to the outside world; even Greville, who heard everything, heard nothing of it at the time; and in any case it failed. The King's prayer was granted; he did survive his niece's eighteenth birthday by four weeks. By the beginning of June everyone knew his days were numbered. All eyes were turned to Kensington Palace. The general feeling was one of hopefulness and an intense relief; grave men, not given to exaggeration, used to say that, if anything had happened to the Princess, and the hated Duke of Cumberland had become King of England as he did become King of Hanover, there would have been a revolution. And curiosity was immensely enhanced by the fact that, whereas her two predecessors had had

<sup>1</sup>*Letters of Queen Victoria*, I. 82.

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only too ample opportunity of displaying their respective characteristics long before they ascended the throne, the Princess was an absolutely unknown quantity. Who could tell what high political and social consequences might not follow on the accession of a very young and utterly inexperienced girl? The Tories hopefully recalled the traditions of their party. The Radicals, remembering that Lord Durham was a great friend of the Duchess of Kent's, thought of an alliance between Crown and people against the aristocracy and the *bourgeoisie*. There is even said to have been a clique that based high hopes on the influence which Conroy might have been expected to have acquired in the highest quarter. But the natural thing happened, and when William IV died, the new Queen at once informed Melbourne that "it had long been her intention to retain him and the rest of the present Ministry at the head of affairs, and that it could not be in better hands than his."

The scene which occurred on the morning of June 20th, 1837, when, a few hours after the King's death, Queen Victoria met her Privy Council, was never forgotten by anyone who witnessed it. One observer was also watching Melbourne, who laboured under an emotion which he could hardly conceal. He kept repeating with his lips each sentence of her declaration as she read it; his face worked painfully; at moments he seemed likely to break down altogether. "A man of exquisite sensibility," wrote Hatherton, "he no doubt felt a deep anxiety for the success of the almost infant Queen's *début*, and suffered also from the contemplation of his own great responsibility."

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In Parliament he rose to the full height of the occasion by a speech which, for perfection of taste and tone, aroused universal admiration. A eulogy of William IV as a sound constitutional monarch seemed designed in part for the edification of his youthful successor—though indeed Melbourne always allowed that the late King had had his qualities, and that his opposition to himself had been entirely open and above-board. He expressed his conviction that the new Sovereign would be found to act not only with judgment, but also with firmness, at which the Duke of Wellington was heard to cheer with special heartiness. And thus there began an association which has always been reckoned among the most picturesque in English history, and is commemorated in the names of a great state and its capital city on the other side of the globe.

## CHAPTER VIII

### *QUEEN VICTORIA*

THE very first thing, it appears, that Queen Victoria remarked to herself about her Prime Minister was that he was honest. "He is a straightforward, honest, clever and good man," she writes more than once; and we find also several allusions to his "frank and open manner." Later on, it is said, she told him that what had first given her confidence in him was his behaviour in the matter of a dispute about her own allowance which had arisen between the Duchess of Kent and the late King. Melbourne had been badly treated by William IV, and knew that he was not likely to live long; none the less, he had sided against the Duchess, who might soon, for all he knew, have been the most powerful person in the kingdom. A happy childhood the Princess may have had, she could hardly have had an entirely happy youth. The emphasis laid on honesty by one so young suggests a premature experience of its absence, and we have seen what she wrote to her uncle in this connection. Whatever may have been the exact influences which had shaped her adolescence—and among these must be counted her strong reaction against the pretensions, and possibly the intrigues, of Sir John Conroy—they had evidently increased in her a native stubbornness of will, a suppressed resolve that, when once Queen, she would be Queen in-

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deed. These were certainly the qualities which she showed as soon as ever she was emancipated, and throughout the whole of her long reign.

Melbourne may perhaps have been a trifle taken aback by the Tudor decisiveness and promptitude of the Queen's first proceedings. Her mother, who had hoped to be a power in the land, she relegated at once to a respectful distance, assigning her a suite of rooms under her own roof, but excluding her absolutely from the least share in public affairs. Conroy received the shortest shrift. His past services were well rewarded in the pecuniary sense, and he received a baronetcy. But he did not get the peerage for which he asked, and, above all, he was banished from the Queen's presence for ever. He could not, unfortunately, be banished from that of the Duchess of Kent; Melbourne must have cursed the circumstances which made it impossible for him to kick Conroy straight out of Buckingham Palace and forbid him to set foot there again. Within the first three or four days, also, of the opening of the new reign a matter of criminal procedure, in which the Sovereign was concerned, had to be changed; in this connection he made his first remark about her that has come down to us. "From what he had seen of the young Queen," he said, "he did not think she would hesitate to sign a death warrant if the culprit deserved death."

However, the tear of sensibility rose to Melbourne's eye when the Queen insisted at once that the creditors of the late Duke of Kent must be satisfied in full; and no doubt it did strike him as remarkable that one of her first thoughts amidst the dazzling bewilderments of her new position



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should be to pay her father's debts, especially when he remembered the exceeding reluctance of her uncles to pay their own. He was charmed by the natural dignity which, in her first public appearances, lent distinction to her small figure; he was also no doubt flattered by her obvious admiration of himself. Any situation more calculated to appeal to the fund of sentiment which still resided in that elderly bosom it would be hard to imagine. That he would have to assume a peculiarly personal relationship with her was evident from the start. There were not, of course, wanting those who shook their heads at the idea of a close association between the innocent young Queen and a man around whom there clung an aroma, faint but perceptible, of what in those days corresponded to the Divorce Court; Peel, we may suspect, shared this feeling. But those who knew Melbourne recognised that it was the best thing that could have happened—by how much the best thing, circumstances were in due course to reveal.

One of the first questions that arose was that of a secretary for the Queen. The Baroness Lehzen was to act as such for her private affairs, and to exercise an influence on her old pupil which was no doubt greater than appeared. No one wanted to take any risks as regards an official private secretary. Stockmar, indeed, was on the spot, advising and assisting the Queen in various unofficial ways, but he would certainly not have done; it seemed desirable rather to provide some counter-vailing influence. Melbourne thought it "highly to be desired on constitutional grounds that the Queen should not have a private secretary," and accordingly decided to assume the duties of the

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post himself. It was bound to have been a position of unique delicacy and difficulty; the language held by at least one eminent statesman of that day displays the extraordinary importance attached to the question of the persons who should be about the Queen. "I remember," said Peel on a subsequent historic occasion, "that I am to provide the attendants and companions of the young woman on whose moral and religious character depends the welfare of millions of human beings . . . the formation of a Cabinet, the appointment to public offices is easy enough; it is a trifle compared to the difficulties and necessities of this part of my business." How deeply Melbourne felt his own responsibility we have already seen; and he continued to show it by demonstrations which from time to time broke through the surface that he generally presented to the world, and testified to the incompleteness of his cynicism. As on one occasion, when, taking advantage no doubt of a chance opportunity, he read to the young Queen the passage in the Old Testament describing the dream of Solomon: "And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Not in the Queen's Diary, but in Hayward, a reliable authority.

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It was, accordingly, considerations of safety first and foremost that had to govern the appointment of the Queen's Household—of her Ladies of the Bed-chamber, her Women of the Bed-chamber, her Maids of Honour, and the gentlemen who were to be about her. The Court had been tarnished in reputation by George IV and his mistresses; it had not been completely rehabilitated in public esteem by William IV with his importunate brood of natural children; it was of great importance to the young Queen and to the nation that its reputation should be restored forthwith. As regards her ladies, the Queen wished that they should be chosen indifferently from both parties. Melbourne would have been the last man to object to at any rate some of the wives and daughters of his political opponents occupying such posts. He tried, in fact, to procure half of the Queen's Household from Tory families; failing in this, he had taken some Tory wives of Whig peers;<sup>1</sup> but it was unfortunate, as things turned out, that all the more important of the ladies were drawn from his own side. That they were all patterns of their sex we may be sure; that, as subsequent events seem to show, none of them possessed the capacity to deal with an emergency was unlucky, but could not be helped. It is possible that the Ministers, remembering the case of the last Queen Regnant, were not anxious to have women of great force of character about their young Sovereign; and indeed they had not to go back so far as Queen Anne, for William IV had at

<sup>1</sup>Hatherton (May 10th, 1839), on the authority of Lord Portman, husband of an important lady of the household; cf. also Parker, *Peel Papers*, II. 402-3.

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any rate been supposed to have been subject, through Queen Adelaide, to a great deal of petticoat influence. In any case, the composition of the Court was bound to have been mainly feminine; and, under the same roof as the Queen, there was the Duchess of Kent, with her small retinue, also mainly feminine. It was not perhaps a situation likely to have conduced to entire harmony in any case, even if the Queen had not been on bad terms with her mother, if Baroness Lehzen had not been at quiet but persistent feud with the Duchess of Kent and her friends, and Conroy had not been still hanging round the Duchess' apartments, his power for mischief not yet exhausted.

The strictest decorum was the order of the day; no one could have been more particular on this point than Melbourne. The Maids of Honour, of whose junketings under previous *régimes* there were lively memories, complained bitterly that Lord Melbourne would not allow them to walk on the terrace at Windsor by themselves. "Mayn't I just for once, Lady Lyttelton?" one of them would say. "I'm sure we never meet anyone there but M. van de Weyer, and what could that signify?" As to the degree of respectability which should qualify for admission into the Queen's virgin presence, Melbourne, who perhaps felt some slight personal interest in this matter, ruled as follows. Actual proof of delinquency was to be required for exclusion, such as the verdict of a court of law; otherwise, he told the Queen, it was better not to enquire what anyone's past life had been.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Girlhood*, I. 288. An editorial omission is indicated at this interesting point.

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Melbourne was now more or less permanently at Buckingham Palace or Windsor. The Tories were not pleased at this, and their Press forgot its manners badly when it had occasion to deal with the subject. One of H. B.'s cartoons, pleasantly entitled "Susannah and the Elders" and reproduced in Mr. Guedalla's *Life of Palmerston*, represents the innocent young Queen riding between Melbourne and Palmerston: another, "The Queen in Danger," represents the Queen playing chess, and the same two elderly and wicked men hanging over her. But responsible opinion was voiced by the Duke of Wellington—"By God, I wish he was always there"; and in fact, what with one thing and another, Melbourne was, it was reckoned, some six hours a day in the Queen's company. How he stood it all his friends sometimes wondered; but they need not have wondered. Studious though he may have been to conceal it, he would have been more or less than human if he had not felt some pride of place, and he was eminently human. Moreover, he had never had a daughter; he was finding one now in a Queen—and a Queen who was, to all intents and purposes, as much alone in the world as he was himself. He was savouring the freshness of a new emotional relationship—a relationship with a flavour unlike that of any other, and they had been numerous, of which he had had previous experience. He was also studying, with many hopes and speculations, the possibilities of a character which, if not apparently very extraordinary in itself, was fraught with an immense adventitious interest. He noted the restraint which circumstances and training had led the young



A GAME AT CHESS (Again)  
'The Queen in Danger'

(From a cartoon by John Doyle (H. B.) in the collection of Political Sketches by H. B. in the British Museum)



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Queen to place on a nature that was naturally affectionate and feelings that were naturally warm; he was half amused, half touched, by the gravity which was indeed broken into by the high spirits of eighteen, but, as a rule, only when she was quite sure of her company. One or two other traits in her, signs of a "peremptory disposition," her Prime Minister noted with some anxiety. However, she was at any rate quite unlike Lady Caroline Lamb or Mrs. Norton; it was as well.

Queen Victoria's Court was not, even in its first youth, an enlivening place; whether, if the Queen had married somebody else, it might have become so, it is vain to conjecture; all we can say is that its characteristic note appears to have been present from the beginning. Etiquette was rigid; the Queen showed very soon that she had something of her father in her, and the Duke of Kent had been renowned as a martinet. Though pleasant and unaffected in manner, she had no great stock of the lighter social gifts and graces. Nor, though by no means wanting in mother wit, had she any intellectual interests; like all save the worst of her immediate predecessors, she was apt to be suspicious of people who were not clever enough to disguise their cleverness. The hours after dinner were accordingly passed in a laboured round of trivialities; the regular presence of the disappointed Duchess of Kent, to whom the Queen was scrupulously polite, could hardly have made for a spirit of all-round geniality; the more *blasé* among the visitors to the Court, such as Greville, were bored to death. But they saw one interesting sight. In the drawing-room, evening after evening, week



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after week, sat the admirable and devoted Melbourne, bolt upright, choosing his language with the utmost care, a changed man. Only once was he heard to talk about "a damned dishonest act" in the Royal Presence, years afterwards, when Peel decided upon a total repeal of the Corn Laws. He talked of men and things, kings and queens, art and letters in a manner adapted to Her Majesty's age and comprehension; he was particular that she should hear nothing that "a girl of fifteen" might not hear; of "flighty women," in particular, he professed a most edifying disapproval. However, he could not conform completely. The Queen, who regarded him as privileged, remarked with amusement that he often talked to himself and sometimes fell asleep—a lapse of this last kind she charitably took as "a sure sign of his not being well."

Lady Melbourne had now been dead for twenty years. But if she could have been vouchsafed a glimpse of the world with which she had been so intensely preoccupied while in it, her heart would have rejoiced. She would have seen the Queen of England hanging on her son's slightest word, laughing with all her teeth at his mildest sallies, committing all she could remember of his conversation to her diary every evening. To no other statesman, surely, can it have happened to have been Boswellised in the journal of a reigning sovereign. Its artless pages are, indeed, largely a record of "Lord M." as he was in his hours of ease, and playing a part which it is quite certain that no other statesman of that time, not Wellington, nor Peel, nor Palmerston, nor Russell, could have played so well, or indeed played at all. They would

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all, in their various ways, have tried to overwhelm her, and succeeded in irritating her. But Melbourne had a very different way with him, lavishing as he did upon his young mistress not only the sagacity of the statesman, the occasional, if not always effective, admonitions of the mentor, but all the charm which had won the hearts of many men, and many women.

Of their official intercourse, carried on personally over State Papers, or in the notes which they exchanged sometimes three or four times a day, we get only occasional glimpses in the Queen's diary; for that we must go to her correspondence. But here also—as in the general conduct of his Government for that matter—Melbourne's work lay largely out of sight, and the best part of it was performed under conditions which precluded a record. He had to teach her the position assigned to the Crown in that complex organism, the English Constitution, and that at a time when the slow crystallisation of practice and opinion which is English constitutional history was only just beginning to forbid the Sovereign an active intervention in party politics. He had to indicate to her the boundaries which lay between the real and the nominal powers which were vested in her office, to initiate her into the actual workings of a system which was too dependent on half-acknowledged compromises and unwritten precedents to be comprised in any code of rules. Providence had certainly made a special intervention on the young Queen's behalf; Melbourne's very weaknesses as a statesman rendered him all the more effective as a tutor. Always unable to believe that his own political party had a

monopoly of the truth, he was not likely to have yielded to tendencies by which another statesman in his position, however honourable in intention, might have been unconsciously influenced.

Nobody, again, could have explained to the Queen more justly and more kindly the idiosyncrasies of the leading statesmen of the day. And, not unimportant, he could place at her command an unrivalled knowledge of that section of society with which she would necessarily come chiefly into contact. He knew everyone in the great world, and everyone's belongings—the relationships, the friendships, the feuds within the group of families who still, in spite of the Reform Bill, ruled England. He could retail for her amusement a judicious selection from a rich store of reminiscence and anecdote in this connection—a store of which the full extent and flavour could only be displayed to a mature, and a masculine, intelligence. The Queen, indeed, had occasion to remonstrate with him on this head—"He said *such* things about people's families to them." An exquisite pleasure also, he could tell her much that she did not know about her own royal predecessors—about the Court of George III and Queen Charlotte, about "the gay Prince and Poins," and—by which he conveyed some oblique warnings to herself—about his own experiences as a Minister of George IV and William IV. The Queen, on her side, showed the greatest curiosity about him; was never tired of drawing him out about himself, and listened eagerly to all that others could tell her. She soon learned all about his father, mother and wife; how clever and agreeable his mother had been; how

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his father had been neither; what a terrible life Lady Caroline Lamb had led her husband, and how good he had been to her. And, one day in 1838, Her Majesty was exceedingly interested to hear that a cousin of his had lately come to live at Windsor—Lady Byron, in fact. But Lady Byron—possibly to Melbourne's relief—had no desire to present herself at the Castle, and he had to make excuses. He himself, it seems, had seen nothing of his cousin for many years—and no wonder; but he now paid her a long visit, during which he displayed more obvious agitation than she did. Miss Milbanke had not altogether approved of William Lamb in old days; nor did Lady Byron altogether approve of Lord Melbourne. A friend of hers, who was present at the interview, remarked on the Prime Minister's "very small self-esteem." "He would have kept better company," was Lady Byron's comment, "if he had respected himself more."<sup>1</sup>

The unusual company which Melbourne was now keeping made all the difference in the world to his personal position; the contrast which his young and affectionate, if not exactly docile, pupil offered to William IV was almost grotesque in its completeness. Whereas no Prime Minister since Addington had been on intimate personal terms with the Sovereign, and the Whigs in particular had always tended to hold themselves aloof from the Throne, Melbourne could get anyone he liked asked to the Palace, and Windsor Castle became his country house. Tory ladies, full of curiosity about the Queen, displayed a sudden affability, and

<sup>1</sup>From Miss E. C. Mayne's *Lady Byron* (Constable, 1929), p. 371.

beckoned him to their carriages in the Park. In appearance there had been nothing like it since the Protector Somerset and Edward VI; to those—and they were necessarily the vast majority—who knew nothing of Queen Victoria he seemed a Mayor of the Palace. The change also meant a new lease of life not only to the Prime Minister, but to his party. The Whigs found themselves in the unaccustomed position of possessing the full support of the Crown, even though the General Election, which it was then the custom to hold at the beginning of a new reign, had not appreciably altered the even balance of parties. That of 1837 had been notable for the manner in which the Whigs used the Queen's name for all it was worth, and also for the failure of several eminent Radicals to keep their seats. "I for one," wrote Mrs. Grote to Place, "will never consent to wag a hand or foot to awaken the great public up from its lethargy until these base Whigs are sent a-packing. Roebuck is the only sound Radical qualified to head a vigorous movement." But Roebuck had been rejected at Bath in favour of a member of the aristocracy, and had given the electors a piece of his mind from the hustings. "Let them," he said, "servilely worship their rising sun; let them crawl before his lordship and sycophantically adore him. I have done with them."

"The people's voice, is odd.  
It is, and it is not, the voice of God."

So far as Parliament was concerned, the Whigs were as much as ever dependent upon the Irish vote. And the obstructive tactics of the Lords continued, and were such that Lord John Russell,

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in a memorandum to the Cabinet, was ill-judged enough to urge that it should be overcome by the drastic measure of creating batches of peers *in terrorem*. It is not surprising that Melbourne refused to comply with this suggestion.

The first important question that arose in the new reign was a colonial question. Canada was then divided into an Upper Province, mainly Scottish and Protestant, and a Lower Province, mainly French and Roman Catholic. Owing to the neglect with which successive English Governments had treated colonial administration, and to the incompetence of the Whig Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, both Provinces had been for some time in an exceedingly disturbed condition. The representative assemblies, which were popularly elected, had been in acute conflict with the legislative councils, which were filled largely with English nominees; the assemblies had stopped supplies, and rebellions had broken out in both Provinces. These were dealt with without much difficulty; that in the Upper Province was suppressed by the energy and resource of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Francis Head. But Head's general conduct had not commended itself to the Home Government; and on his return he obtained an interview with the Prime Minister, whom he found in the act of shaving. He claimed that he had saved the Colony. "And so you did," replied Melbourne. Head continued to press his case; the Prime Minister continued to shave, until, laying down his razor, he at length turned round, faced Head, and said, "But you see you're such a damned odd fellow"—a verdict which Mr. Lloyd

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Sanders considers to have been fully justified by Head's indiscreet book, *A Narrative of Recent Events in Canada*.

The situation in French Canada was more serious.

Melbourne, like most Whigs of his generation, professed himself ready to contemplate in theory a separation of the Colonies from the mother country, but he was decidedly averse to it in practice. The state of Canada was such that the Government decided to suspend the Constitution of the Lower Province, and to send out a man armed with special powers. Their choice fell on Lord Durham, now back from St. Petersburg, and a potential leader of the Radical party. Melbourne, who was convinced that there could be no peace in any Cabinet where Durham was, but was aware of his powers, pressed him to accept the office of High Commissioner for Canada, and Governor-General of the British Colonies in North America. It seemed a master-stroke. Durham's political opinions would protect his proceedings at any rate from Radical criticism; and Canada might well afford a fair and, for the time being, a remote field for his activities. Durham, who lacked neither courage nor patriotism, accepted the ungrateful task, and Melbourne viewed the appointment at first with considerable relief, and some hope.

Durham was destined, in virtue of the *Report on the Administration of Canada* which was the product of his mission, to exert a profound influence on British colonial administration. Unfortunately that historic report had nothing to do with his actual proceedings in Canada. He started as badly as

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possible, Melbourne said, by displaying "a pomp and expensiveness" which invited criticism from all quarters, and was supposed, though wrongly, to be paid for by the Government.<sup>1</sup> He also took out with him two men—one of them Gibbon Wakefield—of great ability but damaged character; since the wide powers with which he had been invested had not passed the House of Commons without opposition, Melbourne was exceedingly annoyed, and upbraided Durham severely. On his arrival at Québec, Durham found that the ringleaders of the late rebellion had either been lying for some time in prison, or had fled to the United States; what was he to do? Their guilt was clear. But, since the rebellion had been put down, they could not be tried by martial law; it was equally certain that no jury would convict them. It was characteristic of the man that he declined to pack a jury, but preferred to proceed by direct methods. He persuaded his legislative council, which he had formed entirely out of his own staff, to pass his famous "Ordinances." These proclaimed a general amnesty, with some exceptions. Eight of the leading rebels were to be deported to Bermuda, which was neither a penal colony nor within Durham's jurisdiction; sixteen more were forbidden to return to Canada on pain of incurring the penalties of high treason. Unfortunately he left the Home Government without full information,<sup>2</sup> and thus handicapped them in their defence of these strong and actually illegal measures.

The news reached England, where a powerful enemy of the Government saw the opportunity of

<sup>1</sup>Hatherton, April 30th, 1838.

<sup>2</sup>*Papers*, p. 255.



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paying off sundry old scores. Brougham flew at Durham in the House of Lords. It was nothing to him that he did not know Canada, and that Roebuck, who had been brought up in the Colony, begged him to leave it alone. The debates which ensued in both Houses stand out in vivid relief from the dismal parliamentary history of Melbourne's second administration. Brougham urged in the most forcible manner, and as a matter of principle, that the powers with which Durham had been invested did not include that of introducing novelties into the criminal jurisprudence of the Empire, and that the whole of the Ordinances gave an impression of "ignorance, haste and a total neglect of what was lawful." It fell to Melbourne to defend the Governor-General in the House of Lords. The suggestion that he abandoned Durham too easily,<sup>1</sup> that the situation could have been saved by retrospective legislation, derives no support from a consideration of what had been the consistent attitude of the Lords to Melbourne's Government. There is not the smallest reason to suppose that anything would have induced them to go out of their way to oblige him by rescuing a man who was so unpopular with most of themselves as Durham was. Nor did the case appear strong enough in itself to afford a fair ground for resignation. Melbourne did his best with weak materials, facing Brougham's infuriated rhetoric calmly, and a little contemptuously—"The fact is," he afterwards said of one outbreak, "if I had said anything the fellow would have gone stark staring mad." He did not lose his temper—he

<sup>1</sup>Urged especially in Stuart's Reid's *Life of Durham*.

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seldom did—but he warmed up now and then. He besought their Lordships to trust the man on the spot; Lord Durham must have had strong reasons for the course he had taken—let them wait and hear what they were. Otherwise, they would be acting not like a “generous and high-minded nobility,” but like “a low and truculent democracy, or, perhaps, more like one of those jealous aristocracies which formerly existed.” But it was of no use; the Duke of Wellington himself refused to regard Durham’s action as a merely technical illegality; the lawyers were with Brougham to a man; and the Ordinances were disallowed. Durham resigned, and in a proclamation of extraordinary indiscretion appealed to Canadian feeling against the Home Government. He returned a bitterly disappointed man, to do more for Canada by his pen than his temperament had permitted him to do by his acts. The main features of his recommendations, which included the union of the two Provinces under a practically autonomous government, were carried out by his successor, Lord Sydenham, in the last days of Melbourne’s administration.

The Government was not strengthened by this episode, and was growing weaker and weaker during the years 1838–9—still struggling in a morass of Irish questions, to solve which on Liberal principles seemed a task beyond human powers. It was indeed able to pass a Poor Law Bill for Ireland, which, framed on the English model, caused a hatred of the workhouses among the peasants even more intense than that felt by their English brethren. But the “Appropriation Clause” seemed

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the thin end of the wedge to those who scented a repeal of the Union and the disestablishment of the Church first in Ireland and then in England; it was also feared that a remodelling of the Irish Municipal Corporations would hand over the country to, in Peel's words, "priests and demagogues." As regards the tithes, something had to be done, and at length, and in sheer weariness, something was done. A compromise was arranged, but one which involved the abandonment of the very principle upon which the Government had resumed office in 1835; the "Appropriation Clause" was dropped, and the revenues of the Irish Church were thus allowed to remain intact until its disestablishment in 1869. To say, as has very often been said, that the Whigs ought to have resigned is to ignore the contemporary realities of the situation. Neither Peel, nor Wellington, nor anyone save the Tory and the Radical extremists wanted them to resign. Nor did O'Connell; he had no desire to upset on this point a Government which, as he himself put it, was adding millions to the King's subjects in Ireland.

Ireland meanwhile, thanks to Drummond and O'Connell, was enjoying a period of comparative tranquillity. But agrarian crime had not ceased among the homicidal part of the population; and the murder, under mysterious circumstances, of a prominent and inoffensive Irish landlord in broad daylight and in his own demesne aroused the greatest indignation. An Orange peer demanded a Commission of Enquiry into the whole period of Normanby's (the Lord Lieutenant's) administration—which amounted to a vote of censure on the

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Government. A stormy debate took place in the Lords, a debate which did no good to Ireland or to anything else. The Government produced figures to show that crime had diminished. The statistics were, of course, bitterly contested, as everything was and is concerning a country from which, it has been said, when St. Patrick banished snakes he also banished facts. Drummond's famous reminder to the Tipperary magistrates was hurled in the Government's teeth, as having been an incitement to crime. Brougham attacked Normanby with especial virulence. He concluded his speech by a purple passage about Justice, which he had, quite unnecessarily, borrowed from another orator. Melbourne answered his assailants calmly, dealing with Brougham's peroration in the lightest and most deadly fashion. "It undoubtedly," he said, "was a most brilliant passage, but he thought he had heard some of it before. He alluded particularly to that part where he spoke of a vacillating House of Commons, a venal House of Lords, and a corrupt and ambitious Ministry, and of the power of justice overcoming them all. No doubt these were fine expressions; they put him in mind, however, of Sheridan's celebrated eulogium on the liberty of the Press; *but they were by no means the worse for that.*"<sup>1</sup> The Government was beaten in the Lords, but the censure was reversed by the Commons, Peel acquiescing. Thus protected, though from different motives, by both O'Connell and Peel, the Whigs stayed in.

None the less, a Conservative reaction in the country was becoming very perceptible, and Mel-

<sup>1</sup>Fonblanque (not reported in Hansard).

bourne, whose virtues were tending more and more to confine themselves to the intellectual sphere, remarked with the greatest philosophy the progress of a tendency which he knew to be inevitable. He was quite conscious that, whereas Peel's party was eminently English in its composition, its sentiments, its intelligence and its unintelligence, he owed his own tenure of power to the precarious support of a congeries of Irish Catholics, Scotch Presbyterians and angular Radicals. The average Englishman was becoming tired of Commissions and Committees, frightened by the beginnings of Chartist agitation, and suspicious of some of the first-fruits of social legislation. Sydney Smith, a once ardent reformer who had cooled, said that the whole earth was in commission, and that the human race had been saved from the Flood only to be delivered over to barristers of six years' standing. The Government official and the Government Inspector were beginning to be abroad in the land; they were something new and strange; and in none of the aspects which they assumed were they universally welcome. The child victims of the factory might be thankful, but they had no votes; their employers, who had, did not appreciate the advantages of factory inspection. In the Poor Law administration a new and crude officialism assumed its most unpopular guise. Municipal Reform, again, had done nothing to increase the popularity of the Government which had secured it, and for very natural reasons; the many were not nearly so grateful for the gift of a vote as the few were resentful at the loss of influence and perquisites. Nor did the clergy like the increasing activities

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of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners; while the Church, partly because it was being purged by the said Commissioners of some of its worst abuses, was regaining hold on the nation, and providing a nucleus around which there was crystallising a good deal of Conservative sentiment.

Reform had not shot its last bolt by 1838, but not much more was to be accomplished by that generation in the way of administrative reorganisation. Local Government had been remodelled so far as concerned the larger towns; in the country districts, on the other hand, things were to remain much as they had been for many years yet. The principle of centralised government control had been recognised to some extent, and where most immediately necessary, as in the Poor Law, and in factory inspection. But the Benthamite doctrines which had largely shaped the reforming movement had not, in their extremer forms, proved congenial to the English people, who have always preferred to do their reforming piecemeal, and in their own fashion. The solid mass of custom and tradition had been shifted, but it had not been shifted very far; against a dumb instinct for compromise, a rooted individualism, a consequent suspicion of bureaucracy, the most reasoned demands for a stronger and more active State had made but a moderate headway. The current indeed was soon to set in the opposite direction, in that of "*Man versus the State*"; England was returning "to her normal and insular path, from which she had been temporarily deflected by the influence of the French Revolution of 1830."<sup>1</sup> Nor, in the more

<sup>1</sup>Halévy, III. 356.

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strictly political domain, had the process advanced farther. A wider suffrage and the ballot had, in spite of the Radicals, to wait for many years yet; and these results, when they came, were not achieved by men of their type. An hereditary House of Lords, an Established Church retaining a large measure of control over education, however absurd they may have seemed to radicalism and to pure reason, had stood and were to stand firm. The official Radicals had failed in Parliament; they had also, owing partly to their share in the hated Poor Law, alienated the working classes, who were perforce taking to extra-parliamentary agitation. But the middle classes had got what they wanted, and without them no working-class movement had any chance of success.

Melbourne discerned the trend of things accurately enough. Though anything but a democrat politically, he had, like most of his order, far more innate sympathy with the working classes than with the commercial classes. The Victorian Age was looming ahead; in particular, he snuffed in the approaching breeze the advent of the Victorian middle classes, and did not like the prospect. He suspected some of their most salient characteristics—a religion which, however sincerely held, was not incompatible with an immense self-satisfaction; a morality which, though sound, coexisted with a wonderful power of not seeing what it did not want to see; an energy which was too exclusively occupied with the material apparatus of life to have much time over for the art of living, and created the larger part of our industrial towns. In one respect, indeed, he felt that their reverential in-

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instincts could be trusted ; he was convinced that the Peerage would survive. Some remarks he made not long after the passage of the Municipal Reform Bill seem especially prescient when we remember that no less a man than Macaulay was then prophesying that the House of Lords could not last more than a few years. "You may not," he said, "see all the consequences of this to-morrow, but it is the middle-class Dissenters who will gain, and not the mob or the theorists. Every year their strength will be felt more and more. Depend upon it, it is the Established Church and not the hereditary Peerage that has need to put its house in order."



## CHAPTER IX

### QUEEN VICTORIA (*continued*)

“**T**he new year dawns, the brave new year,  
And still my place I hold;  
Oh, sweet it is to linger here,  
First Lamb of all the fold,”

said the *Morning Post*, breaking into poetry on the first day of 1839. Melbourne was indeed still at the Palace, watching the political situation with his usual detachment. As regards Ireland, he told the Queen that he would be rather in favour of letting them have their Commission of Enquiry if they wanted it; but that Normanby, the Lord Lieutenant, was against it—“He shouldn’t mind being abused, nobody should mind that.” As regards resigning, he saw no reason to depart from a declaration that he had made in 1836, to the effect that, so long as he possessed the confidence of the Crown and a majority in the House of Commons, he would not be overborne by the House of Lords. If he had to compromise, he would compromise; if he could not get the whole, he would take half, or even a quarter. Melbourne was, so far as his politics were concerned, eminently a realist. This attitude, if not spectacular, was useful. Granting that the legislation which his Government had still to pass was beneficial legislation, all credit is due to the man who kept the Government together.

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The personal relations between Melbourne and the Queen continued to be as cordial as ever; we hear of only one serious difference between them, and that was when the Queen insisted on limiting to five minutes the time allowed to the men after dinner. "She is," Melbourne once said, "the honestest person I have ever known, the only difficulty is to make her see that you cannot always go straight forward; that you must go round about sometimes." With regard to weightier matters, she displayed sufficient aptitude for affairs, and a conscientious industry. As the editor of the *Diary* remarks, Melbourne's letters to her become more full and careful after 1838, and her replies begin to gain in strength and clearness. That she seemed to be imbibing sound constitutional doctrine was shown, for example, by a letter which she wrote in March of this year to King Leopold, *à propos* of Thiers and the state of affairs in France—"It is a pity that Louis Philippe should show so much dislike to a man he *must* take." However, though conscious of her own ignorance, and turning for advice to Melbourne exclusively, she was by no means a passive or an unquestioning pupil. She never gave an immediate reply to an application; when this was remarked upon, Melbourne said it was not because she desired to consult himself; she showed the same deliberation with him. And she was capable, by the summer of 1839 at any rate, of taking him sharply to task if necessary, *e.g.* for neglecting to inform her that a change in ministerial posts was not only in contemplation, but had actually taken place. Lord Melbourne, she very firmly reminded

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him, ought not to "let the Queen be the last person to hear what is settled and done in her own name." She was "a good deal annoyed," and let Melbourne know it.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, it was not merely a question of a proper insistence on her constitutional rights. The signs of a "peremptory disposition" which she had manifested from the start had already caused him uneasiness, and, in the privacy of State business, he doubtless used a plainness of speech in this respect which she had too much sense to resent. But the world saw nothing of this; and visitors were greatly impressed by Melbourne's manner to his liege lady, an inimitable blend of fatherly affection, courtly homage and unconstrained ease, interspersed, however, by fits of dreaminess and absence of mind which occurred even in her presence. Some of her characteristics rather disconcerted him. While she was pleasant enough in the ordinary way, her upbringing had naturally not been such as to encourage her in expansiveness; the reserve which she displayed in personal relationships particularly struck her elderly and genial mentor. For example, she had, or at any rate she showed, no preference for one above another of the ladies by whom she was surrounded. "It's strange, for so young a person," her Prime Minister reflected aloud, "still, you lead an unnatural life, the life of a man." The Queen replied that, though she was very fond of some of them, she dared not show preferences; Lady Tavistock she liked, because she was "so very discreet."

However, she continued to show a decided prefer-

<sup>1</sup>*Letters*, I. 184.

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ence for Melbourne's society. Her relations with her mother were growing progressively worse. International politics were beginning to compel her to give her Uncle Leopold to understand that his affectionate niece Victoria was one thing, but the Queen of England was another thing. Melbourne was the only man upon whom she could wholly rely; after a year he was more firmly entrenched than ever at the Palace; the Queen, it was credibly reported, followed him with her eyes when he left the room, and sighed when he was gone. If, as the Duke of Wellington said, and as he himself frankly allowed might be the case, he was inclined to temper his instruction of his royal pupil with too much amusement, it would seem, in the light of subsequent developments, that it might have been counted to him for virtue. His royal pupil was never tired of noting in her diary his little peculiarities, and his jets of quaint humour; his speculations, for example, concerning the royal cat: "I wonder if lapping is a pleasant sensation, for that is a thing we have never felt"; his insistence on taking two apples at dinner so that he might have the "power, the *full* power of eating two"; his habit of sitting at the window and musing over the rooks, which he said were his delight. One day, again, we find him wondering why it was that, while drunkenness was injurious to individuals, this did not seem to apply to nations—"Sober nations, such as the Spaniards, were not good for much." The unimpeachable character of his sentiments as to the bearings of morality on literature also struck her; Melbourne, it seemed, disapproved of *Oliver Twist*—it was all

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about workhouses and coffin-makers and pick-pockets—"I don't like that low debasing style; it's just like the Beggar's Opera; I shouldn't think it would tend to raise morals." Life was pleasant for the time being. During the first year or so of the new reign, Melbourne had been enjoying something of an oasis; except for Canada, things had been tolerably quiet, and his new position was extremely interesting to—as he once said in Parliament in this connection—"a man of feeling." But circumstances, and a character, were soon to develop in a manner which was to chequer what has been called "the Melbourne idyll" with scenes the reverse of idyllic.

From the autumn of 1838 Melbourne had been left in sole possession of the field at Court. Stockmar had been exceedingly useful in helping the Queen with various branches of her business, and had acquired great influence; but his time was not yet, and, in any case, he would not have stood much chance as against Melbourne with a Queen who was also a girl of nineteen. Not that the two men were on anything but good terms. If, we would have thought, there was one man less likely than another to have appealed to enjoying English gentlemen such as Melbourne and Palmerston, it would have been that dyspeptic schemer, with a strong touch of the German pedant in him, who was content to lavish powers, which might have given him almost any position in the world, on promoting the matrimonial and other interests of a minor continental house for which they could not have cared two straws. But—and it is creditable to them as well as to Stockmar—they both

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had an excellent opinion of him; disinterestedness such as his, especially in combination with abilities such as his, they had no doubt learned to rate very highly. However, Stockmar was now abroad, and on a delicate mission. He was accompanying Prince Albert on a continental tour, observing him most attentively, bear-leading him in a manner that would have driven a normal English youth to rebellion and the worst courses, reporting on him at intervals, and deciding, after careful thought and with some hesitation, that he would do as a husband for Queen Victoria. This absence was regarded by Stockmar himself as a calamity; if only he had been on the spot, a disastrous episode which was about to occur and do serious, though only temporary, damage to the prestige of the Court might have been avoided. But it is very doubtful whether he, or any other man, could have succeeded in a matter which concerned the highest ladies in the land, and the reputation of one of their number. It is a long and deservedly forgotten scandal, but it has its biographical importance, and must needs be recalled.

One day, late in January or early in February 1839, Melbourne was perturbed by a visit from one of the Queen's Ladies of the Bed-chamber. The matter concerned Lady Flora Hastings, who had been for some years Lady-in-waiting to the Duchess of Kent, and was living with the Duchess in Buckingham Palace. Everyone, it appeared, was saying that "if Lady Flora was not secretly married, she ought to be." Melbourne thereupon sent for Sir James Clark, Physician in Ordinary, and asked him, we may assume in the strictest

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confidence, whether he could throw any light upon the matter. Clark, from his own account,<sup>1</sup> had been attending the lady in the ordinary way, but had not communicated to her a suspicion which he had formed as to her real condition; he had wished to examine her more closely, but had been refused permission. He now told Melbourne that, while he thought she might be pregnant, he could not in the circumstances be quite sure. Melbourne refused to believe the report, and expressed a hope that the ladies would keep quiet. After all, he doubtless reflected, the matter was eminently one which would solve itself if left alone; nor was Lady Flora a young girl, but a woman of thirty-three, and presumably able to take care of herself, at any rate with her own sex.

But the scandal grew; into its origin it would be tedious and fruitless to attempt to enquire; Lady Flora evidently had her enemies. Melbourne, had he spoken with the tongue of men and of angels, could not have stopped its progress; it was a woman's business, and that no woman was found to settle it quietly and effectually was by no means creditable to the older ladies of the Court. Someone brought the matter before the Queen, and the next stage in the affair is involved in some obscurity. Who it was who suggested a medical examination we do not know; that Melbourne had nothing to do with it we have his own word;<sup>2</sup> nor, though it has been made a matter of accusation against him, is

<sup>1</sup>Printed in the *Annual Register*, 1839, and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup>Lady Flora Hastings, *Statement, etc.*, p. 5. It may, of course, be the case, as stated in the *D.N.B.*, Art. *Lady Flora Hastings*, that Melbourne "reluctantly consented" to a medical examination, but I can find no evidence of it.

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there anything to show that he could have prevented its taking place. At Clark's invitation, Lady Flora selected a doctor who had known her from childhood; Clark, rather unwillingly according to his own account, examined her also. The two physicians signed a certificate which vindicated the lady completely (February 17th, 1839); she was, in fact, suffering from an internal tumour; though she had not, to her credit, let it prevent her going about her duties as usual. That, as Lady Flora subsequently asserted, Clark behaved to her with brutal rudeness is quite incredible; no one capable of acting in that manner would have been the respected and popular Court physician that Clark, whatever his professional shortcomings may have been, undoubtedly was. Lady Flora received, apparently with a good grace, the apologies of the ladies, and an expression of regret from Queen Victoria herself.

It was a bad business. The embittered atmosphere of the two courts with their rival factions must be held responsible; it would be futile to try and fix the blame on any one person. The case was eminently one for "least said, soonest mended"; but that would perhaps have been asking too much of human nature. At any rate, an intolerable deal more was said, and Conroy was believed to have been the prime mover. Lady Flora had not been able to refrain from writing to a member of her family about her triumphant escape from a wicked conspiracy engineered by a "certain foreign woman" (*i.e.* the Baroness Lehzen). She invited her correspondent to "tell it right and left," an invitation with which he made haste to comply. The Marquis of Hastings, Lady Flora's brother, hurried



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up to London with the intention of calling Melbourne out, but was soon satisfied that he had had nothing to do with it. Lady Flora's mother addressed a threatening letter to the Queen; it was, we may be sure, the only time in her long life that Her Majesty ever received such a communication.<sup>1</sup> Melbourne addressed to Lady Hastings a letter of grave rebuke, pointing out that Her Majesty had seized the first opportunity of assuring Lady Flora of her conviction that a mistake had been made, and that she was "still most anxious to do anything in her power to soothe the feelings of Lady Flora and her family." But neither common sense, common fairness, nor, apparently, the remonstrances of Melbourne and Wellington, prevented Lord Hastings from sending this and other correspondence to the newspapers. The Hastings family were Tories, and the Tories preferred to see the hidden and sinister hand of the Whigs in the affair. Their Press was accordingly not slow in taking the matter up, with digressions into the kindred and exciting topics of the purity of English womanhood, the influence of the Whigs on the young Queen, and the moral characters of her male entourage. It was, the *Morning Post* opined, "the Queen's royal mother rather than Lady Flora Hastings that Lord Melbourne's minions intended to annoy, insult and drive, if possible, from the Palace and the society of her daughter." The Hastings family urged especially the dismissal of Sir James Clark;—what good that would have done, except to reopen the whole business, it is difficult to see, and Melbourne refused to advise it. Meanwhile,

<sup>1</sup>Published in the *Times*, April 17th, 1839, only three weeks before the Bed-chamber affair.

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a controversy on the subject of Lady Flora was carried on for some weeks between the *Morning Post* on behalf of the Tories and the *Globe* on behalf of the Whigs, and added considerable interest to the columns of those journals.

Such was the situation in May 1839—the Queen excited and suspicious; the chief personages of her Court supposed, at any rate by the Tories, to have disgraced themselves; Melbourne driven half-distracted—when there came a sudden political crisis. It arose on this wise. Slavery had been formally abolished in the West Indies since 1833; but, in order to give the planters time to look round, and the negroes time to prepare themselves for the blessings of freedom, an interim period of apprenticeship had been allowed as a prelude to complete emancipation. This arrangement, since it tempted the worst of the planters in Jamaica to extract from their apprentices the maximum of labour that was compatible with the minimum of food, had not been productive of all the good anticipated; it worked, indeed, so awkwardly that the colonies themselves emancipated their slaves before the appointed time. But the Government had heard the worst accounts of the Jamaican prisons, and could not get them reformed without causing something like a revolt. The planters, in the course of an insolent manifesto, averred that, whatever cruelties they had been accused of, their civilisation had never produced a Burke; meaning thereby, not the author of the *Reflections on the French Revolution*, but the eminent murderer of the same name. The Whigs decided, as they had done with Canada, to suspend the Constitution of Jamaica; it was not perhaps the wisest thing they

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could have done, but a government must be allowed its feelings. Owing to Radical opposition their majority on the question was so small that Melbourne felt he could not go on. The Queen now saw herself faced with a contingency which she had come to dread more and more—with parting from her beloved Minister in favour of the leader of the Conservatives, a man to whom she appears to have already taken a dislike on sight.

Melbourne, as in duty bound, advised the Queen to have recourse to the Conservatives, since the Radicals were impossible. He said, however, that he thought she ought to show herself very unwilling to let Peel form a Government without “the active assistance in office of the Duke of Wellington.” This was agreed to; but Peel was not in a hopeful mood as to the prospect of forming a stable Government at that time. However, he presented himself at Buckingham Palace, having been put into a frame of mind conducive to an easy and unembarrassed mode of approach by a letter from his old friend Lady de Grey. She had warned him that, with a young girl, first impressions were everything, that his own manners were not of the best, and that he should try and emulate Melbourne in this respect. He certainly meant to try, and his intentions were as conciliatory as possible. But he had intended, very reasonably, to ask that the Queen should give his prospective Ministry, which would be in a minority in the House of Commons, some public token of her personal confidence by removing two or three of her most prominent Whig ladies. There was Lady Normanby, for example; she was reputed to be more in the Queen’s confidence than some others, and

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her husband's policy in Ireland had just recently been the subject of the most furious controversy. But anything to do with the Queen's ladies was bound to have been a matter of some delicacy in the circumstances of the moment, and no doubt Peel's nervousness grew as he approached it. Almost before he could open his mouth on that subject, the Queen intervened with an absolute refusal to remove *any* of them. Peel then retired, hurt, and had recourse to the Duke. The Duke, though he did not like the job, did his best; but the hero of a hundred fights, the victor of Waterloo, the trusted and revered counsellor of princes, could make no impression whatever on this girl of nineteen. Peel accordingly, after consulting his colleagues, declared that he could not form a Government in these circumstances. The Queen thereupon said she would take time for reflection, "but felt quite sure she would not change her mind."

Melbourne had already written to her before the subject came finally to a head. He had reminded her gently that Peel was not a free agent; that she must not allow her personal feelings to interfere with such a matter as the formation of a government; that anything was better than to have a situation arising in England similar to that which was obtaining for the moment in France, where no party was able to form a government. He earnestly entreated her not to allow herself to be affected by Peel's manner. "Depend upon it," he concluded, "there is no personal hostility towards Lord Melbourne, nor any bitter feelings against him. Sir Robert is the most cautious and reserved of mankind. Nobody seems to Lord Melbourne to know him, but he is not therefore deceitful or

dishonest. Many a very false man has a sincere and open manner, and *vice versa*." The Queen, in a very agitated reply, had promised to follow this excellent advice in every respect: "She trusts Lord Melbourne will help her, and be to her what she told him he was, and begged him still ever to be—a father to one who never wanted support more than she does now."<sup>1</sup>

The night unfortunately brought the Queen little sleep, and less wisdom. Another excited letter was scribbled off to Melbourne before she gave her final response to Peel. Melbourne saw her, and called a meeting of the late Cabinet. For the first, though not for the last time, he was placed in a really serious dilemma by his Sovereign. On the one side was his personal feeling, his mistaken though genuine belief that Peel was treating her harshly by demanding the removal of *all* her ladies,<sup>2</sup> his opinion that, so far as concerned the officers of her Household who were not in Parliament, the precedents were, strictly speaking, in her favour. On the other side, there were the obvious public considerations of which he had already reminded

<sup>1</sup>*Letters*, I. 160–61.

<sup>2</sup>There are bound to be some discrepancies in the records of an affair of this kind, and the Queen was confessedly writing up her Diary in circumstances of hurry and excitement (*Girlhood*, II. 163). As pointed out by Miss Ramsay (*Peel*, p. 248 n.) it is not clear who was responsible for this particular misunderstanding. M. Halévy (III. 249 n.) also points out a discrepancy between *Girlhood*, II. 161, and Melbourne's speech in Hansard, 47. 1009–10—as to the advice he gave the Queen before she first saw Peel. The passages as they stand certainly cannot be reconciled; but it does not follow from the statement attributed to him in the former that Melbourne would have advised her to resist if Peel pressed his demands.

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her. But there was little time for cool reflection. All these letters, hurrying to and fro, and consultations had been crammed into the short interval between Peel's first interview with the Queen (shortly after 2 p.m., May 8th) and Melbourne's "Cabinet meeting" (10 p.m., May 10th).

However, it seems that the man in Melbourne was already in process of conquering the statesman—it generally did—when his excited colleagues were summoned from their dinners to his house. Lord John Russell spoke strongly for the Queen; some wavered. On this Melbourne read two letters which he had received from the Queen; if she consented, it appeared, "she might be deprived of her friends one by one, even to her dressers," and "be surrounded by spies." It was unanswerable; there was something in the situation which awoke romantic sentiments in the hearts even of middle-aged Whig statesmen; words were used about "abandoning such a Queen and such a woman." A short official note was drawn up for the Queen to send to Peel, whose resignation was speedily published.

But when Melbourne next saw the Queen, and read a written memorandum which Peel had addressed to her, he was startled. He found that Peel, so far from having peremptorily demanded the removal of *all* her ladies, had merely asked for the removal of *some* of them. But Her Majesty waved this little discrepancy airily aside; "Some or all," she said, "was the same." It was not the same; and Melbourne, now again Prime Minister, had to consult his Cabinet. It was probably at this juncture that he implored a third person to endeavour to persuade Peel not to refuse office—

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"He must have it," he exclaimed, "he absolutely must have it."<sup>1</sup> But it was too late, and, in any case, he found his colleagues even more enthusiastic for the Queen than before. Lord John Russell, again firing up, said he could not desert such a woman; and Melbourne's amusement must have been greater still when Hobhouse, who was or had been by way of holding Radical views, said he would rather cut off his right hand than sign any minute advising the Queen to renew negotiations with Peel. She had, it appeared, declared that, if she were advised to take that course, she would send neither for Peel nor for the Duke, but for someone else unspecified. No one knew better than Melbourne that she was capable of doing what she said.

On the personal side Melbourne, as usual, said the last word. "Always give people time to come round; Peel's great fault was that he did not give the Queen time to come round." In Parliament he put the best possible face on the affair in a speech which was well received. If there was one form of accusation, he said, about which he cared less than another, it was that of unduly clinging to office. The only accusation about which he did care was that of abandoning his post in circumstances of difficulty; and he now resumed office solely because he would not abandon his Sovereign in a situation of difficulty and distress, when demands were made upon her with which, he thought, she ought not to comply. When he was pressed, a little later, to state the principles upon which he meant to conduct the Government, his reply was characteristic. He was averse, he said, to making any general declarations as to the

<sup>1</sup>Parker, *Peel Papers*, II. 403.

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principles on which government should be conducted; besides, they were "so extremely obvious."

History has not been lenient to the Whigs in this matter; and their behaviour in advising the Queen when they were actually out of office has excited the reprobation of constitutional purists. But it is idle to pretend that the circumstances were not exceptional, and no responsible person blamed them at the time. Wellington had not the least desire to turn them out on that question. And Peel, though willing, was not eager to form a Government with a minority in the House of Commons; he knew his time had not yet come. Gladstone, who had been some years in Parliament by then, always maintained that the Whigs had acted for the best in the circumstances.

Melbourne accordingly returned, to the joy of the Queen, and, no doubt, of the Queen's ladies. "The female tyrants of Buckingham Palace," commented a Tory newspaper, "again seized hold of the Royal victim whom they had released for a moment from their foul and poisonous grasp—got up, perhaps, for the occasion some new tale of lasciviousness and slander to hasten the process of corruption, and convince (*sic*) the youthful Majesty of England to say, alas, that she could not live without them."<sup>1</sup> But disaster was impending; Lady Flora Hastings was seriously ill, and the Court had every reason to fear the prospect of her death. "The public," wrote Greville, "will certainly hold an inquest over her body and bring in a verdict of Wilful Murder against Buckingham Palace." Within eight weeks of Melbourne's return she died (July 5th, 1839). Publications such as

<sup>1</sup>*Morning Post*, May 11th, 1839.



*The Palace Martyr*, and *A Voice from the Grave of Lady Flora Hastings*, now took up the parable. A *Warning Letter to the Baroness Lehzen* expressed surprise that "you, a low-born foreign woman of most forbidding aspect," should occupy a confidential position about the Queen. A medical writer in *The Court Doctor Dissected* impugned Clark's treatment of his patient, possibly with knowledge and certainly with ferocity. The manner, indeed, in which ferocity is mingled with sanctimoniousness in these pamphlets renders them infinitely repulsive to our notions; but—and it is a point of interest to the social historian—they were written by people apparently of some education and position, were well printed on good paper, and evidently intended for circulation in clubs and drawing-rooms. The Queen's popularity sank to zero; the Court was plunged, for the moment, into an abyss of discredit far deeper than that from which her advent had rescued it. We have seen one or two examples of what could be published even in the most reputable newspapers of those days; and Melbourne, who came in for much foul-mouthed abuse, would merely have laughed at it so far as he himself was concerned. But it was a question also of one who, as she had recently avowed, regarded him as a father, and was now being attacked through himself and his friends; even Greville admits that he must have suffered tortures during these months. It is true that the Queen's popularity revived with her marriage. But it is no wonder that her Prime Minister seemed to have aged ten years in one year; he was never, in fact, quite the same man again.

## CHAPTER X

### *QUEEN VICTORIA (continued)*

“The Earl of Oxford,” wrote Bolingbroke to Swift in July 1714, “was removed on Tuesday. The Queen died on Sunday. What a world is this, and how does fortune banter us.” Melbourne’s own career, if it had had no turns of such dramatic intensity as this, had contained sufficient unexpectedness of its own to reinforce his ever-present sense of the uncertainty of mortal things. In resuming office, he and his colleagues had chosen what seemed, on the whole, to be the lesser of two evils; but it was an evil none the less, and they had to take the consequences. It is certainly true that some work of great importance still remained which they alone could or would have done, and that Peel’s education of the Conservative party was hardly yet completed. None the less, it was sufficiently humiliating that the Whig Government should seem to have owed its further lease of life to a Court intrigue; the future obviously lay with Peel, and no one saw this more clearly than Melbourne. There was accordingly nothing to do but to carry on, and, as soon as a more than usually dangerous hole appeared in his unseaworthy vessel, to try and stop it for the time being.

Melbourne was, in truth, torn both ways. It was on the Queen that the wifeless, childless man had garnered up his heart; to her, at any rate, he knew

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that he was still indispensable. The toils of an ineluctable fate were closing, but had not yet closed, on the young man who was to be Queen Victoria's husband, and, meanwhile, there was no one else to whom she would listen. Serving his Gloriana, while it worried him at times almost to distraction, had become the absorbing interest of his life, though he knew it must soon end.

Things resumed their wonted course at Buckingham Palace or Windsor; in the morning business, in the afternoon a ride or a drive, in the evening dinner, followed by the few minutes which the Queen grudgingly allowed her masculine guests for the unreserved interchange of their ideas; finally, if there was no ball or concert, polite conversation and round games. Melbourne was not, of course, for ever being called upon to urge Her Majesty along the path of prudence and constitutional duty; there were intervals when he could breathe freely. Then he would talk as easily and happily as ever, broadening, with the influence of wisdom and affection, his young mistress's views on life; gently correcting her crude opinions by his own ripened judgment, and encouraging her in a kindly and tolerant outlook on men and things by example even more than by precept. It cannot have escaped the most casual reader of her Diary that, while Melbourne had frequently to discuss persons with her, he is hardly ever, perhaps never, represented as saying an ill-natured word. He was most careful never to shock or offend her, though he must at times have puzzled her blunt perceptions, as on one occasion when she reproached him for his infrequent attendance at public worship. "I'm a

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quietist," he replied, "it's the creed which Fénélon embraced and Madame de Guyon taught; you are so perfect that you are exempted from all external ordinance, and are always living in God."

It may be doubted whether this association, however good for the Queen, was equally good for Melbourne. The political situation was now less than ever calculated to provide him with any stimulus; the temptation to postpone some of his political duties to his other and more interesting task was overwhelming. Early in 1840 there were rumours of his retiring. Campbell heard him "croaking about his health" at Holland House, in the midst of talking about Sylla, Diocletian and Charles V, and telling, with emotion, the story of the young Queen's immediate determination to pay her father's debts; it was, he said, one of the first things she mentioned after her accession. He was tired out and beginning to weaken; Lord John Russell was more than ever eclipsing him in the eyes of the nation. "If," said Sydney Smith, "the Foreign Secretary were to retire, we should no longer be nibbling ourselves into disgrace on the coasts of Spain. If the amiable Lord Glenelg were to leave us, we should feel secure in our colonial possessions. If Mr. Spring Rice were to go into Holy Orders, great would be the joy of the three per cents. A decent good-looking head of the Government might easily enough be found in lieu of Viscount Melbourne." But the writer was mistaken; Melbourne was still necessary to the Whigs. No one but he could have kept, for example, Palmerston and Russell in the same Cabinet; whether he and the

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Government ought not to have gone out before they did is another question. To his party, and to the general public, he certainly seemed to be losing touch with Parliament and to be living wholly for Buckingham Palace; his colleagues were left more or less to look after themselves; his Attorney-General—a native of Scotland—complained that he no longer gave dinners. Nor was the Palace, with its feminine atmosphere and its inevitable *tracasseries*, a bracing place. And seeing that he had got out of the habit of taking exercise, and that his affection for his dinner had by no means diminished in proportion, his health was no longer very good. Although, as he once wrote to the Queen, "The stomach is the seat of health, strength, thought and life," he does not appear to have treated his own with due respect; his appreciation of the royal *cuisine* excited the apprehensions of Lady Lyttelton, and his Sovereign bluntly informed him that "he ate too much."

Melbourne was, in fact, no longer the man he had been. Up to about 1839 he had borne the burdens of his exalted office with an outward serenity that seemed barely distinguishable from unconsciousness; "Never," a friend had written of him, "did official care sit lighter on any brow." But the Bed-chamber affair, coming on the top of that of Lady Flora Hastings, had shaken him badly; "It's this constant care," he told the Queen. He had only too abundant opportunity of experiencing at the closest quarters the truth of what Harriet Martineau had observed from a distance, that the Queen's expression had, after only a year from her accession, wholly changed, and grown "bold and dis-

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contented." She had qualities of honesty, devotion to duty, and, as she was soon to show, of personal courage; her obstinacy, still less her obvious intellectual limitations, he was not disposed to judge harshly; nevertheless, he feared for the future. "For God's sake don't do that," someone heard him say to her on one occasion, and we may be sure he said it twenty times for once that he was overheard to do so. The Queen, for example, was out of temper with the Duke of Wellington owing to the unpalatable advice which he had given her in the late crisis, and she omitted to enquire after his health at a time when he was seriously ill. Greville, in remonstrating with the Prime Minister on the matter, was kind enough to say that he knew Melbourne did his utmost to keep her straight. "By God," replied Melbourne, feelingly, "I am at it morning, noon and night." On another occasion, if Sir Sidney Lee<sup>1</sup> is right in his interpretation of a chance sally which amused the Queen mightily, Melbourne's freakish humour took a grim turn. Lady Lyttelton had found difficulty in detaching the Queen's crown after an opening of Parliament, and the assembled company were laughing over the incident. "Your Majesty," remarked Melbourne, "might have said with your ancestress, Mary Queen of Scots, that you were not accustomed to being disrobed before so many spectators."

Much might be hoped for if a suitable marriage could be arranged for her; but, as Melbourne reflected, the man who aspired to be the husband of the Queen of England would need a combination of virtues seldom granted to anyone here below.

<sup>1</sup>*Queen Victoria*, p. 101.

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"If we had to *make* a man," he exclaimed to her one day, "we should not know what to make." However, there was a creator at work on human material which seems to have been unusually plastic; a creator who, with the thoroughness of his nation, was leaving as little as possible to unassisted nature; Stockmar was gently, continuously, irresistibly moulding his pupil into the man whom England was to know, and to misunderstand, as the Prince Consort. Melbourne, in consultation with King Leopold, pondered the matter deeply. He had not at first been favourable to Prince Albert's candidature. None the less, the finger of fate seemed to point in that direction; marry the Queen must some day or other; and it was probably desirable that the necessary arrangements should be made by her friends the Whigs rather than by her enemies the Tories. Diplomacy had fixed October 1839 for Prince Albert and his brother to pay a visit to the English Court. Though the Queen protested to Melbourne that the thought of marrying Albert or anyone else was odious to her, it was an old engagement and could not be postponed. The Prince arrived; she fell in love with him at once; proposed, and was accepted. There was joy in the heart of King Leopold; there was a deep and purposeful satisfaction in that of Stockmar; there was a relieved thankfulness in that of Melbourne to see that business settled anyhow. "He seems a very agreeable young man," he wrote to Russell, "he is certainly a very good-looking one—and, as to character, that we must always take our chance of." The matter, had, of course, to be brought before Parliament and the business details settled, but Mel-



BARON STOCKMAR

*(From a lithograph after the painting by F. Winterhalter.)*





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bourne does not appear to have anticipated trouble from that quarter. He was mistaken.

Prince Albert had seen little of England hitherto, and that only as a boy. If, as he is credibly reported to have done during this crucial visit, he observed that no tailor in England could make a coat, and that the proper time for dinner was three o'clock, he was not going the right way to commend himself to the English nobility and gentry. Nor, on the other hand, can it be said that the official proceedings which followed his betrothal were calculated to inspire him with affection for his future home. No doubt, as Melbourne assured the Queen, what bore the appearance of being a love match went right to the heart of a generous people, but, when it came to business, they showed a striking absence of sentiment. The Prince was, for his position, a poor man; his family, though as ancient as any in Europe, was of no great account among continental dynasties; it was accordingly determined to keep him low. As regards his establishment, Lord Ashley expressed the prevalent opinion; "The Prince," he wrote, "should have a sufficiency of pocket-money and a fitting suite of equerries, but no more." As regards his precedence, though there were many and obvious difficulties here, it was made equally plain to him that he must not expect too much from the fact that his marriage with the Queen of England was to raise him above his intrinsic insignificance.

These, needless to say, were not the views of the Queen. The wild idea occurred to her of endeavouring to make her future husband King Consort by Act of Parliament. "For God's sake,

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Madam," replied Melbourne in Johnsonian style, "let's hear no more of it; if you once get the English people into the way of making kings, you will get them into the way of unmaking them." But, though she abandoned that project, she was insistent in other directions. Once again Melbourne was faced with a dilemma between the Queen and Parliament. The Government decided to ask Parliament for an allowance of fifty thousand pounds a year—a sum for which there was previous authority—and, a matter about which the Queen cared a great deal more, for precedence for the Prince next after herself.

But neither the Tories nor the Radicals were in a complying mood. As regards the money, the last named certainly had an excuse in the state of the country; nor would the complaisance of either have been appreciably increased if they had known that the Prince cherished a wish to devote the greater part of it to assisting poor authors and *savants*. It is often said that Melbourne and Russell ought to have attempted to settle the matter by agreement with the leaders of the Opposition, but there is not the least reason to suppose that they would have been able to do so. The Tories, at that time, reciprocated the Queen's sentiments towards themselves; Peel, moreover, rebuffed most decidedly an informal approach made by Russell on another matter just about this time, on the sound constitutional principle that Ministers should not ask Parliament "about what they were *going* to do." It would be long, and quite needless, to recount the details of the various questions that arose and the various negotiations that ensued; almost every

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item caused trouble. The Government had, in deference it was supposed to their Irish supporters, omitted to state officially that the Prince was a "lineal descendant of a House which had always been warmly attached to the Protestant religion." Seeing that some of the Coburgs had, in Melbourne's phrase, "collapsed into Roman Catholicism," and that the Prince himself was simultaneously suspected of being a Roman Catholic and a "Radical and Infidel," this had to be set right. Stockmar incidentally was called upon to asseverate that there was "no essential difference between the Communion Services of the German Protestant and the English Churches."

Nor were the debates on the Prince's allowance, which was cut down from fifty to thirty thousand pounds a year, distinguished by urbanity. Lord John Russell, who introduced into the House of Commons a proposal for the larger sum, blundered badly. He said the Prince's household would cost about eight thousand a year, and, having thus given the Opposition an obvious opening, proceeded to make matters worse by accusing them of a want of loyalty and respect to the Crown. Peel said, that in the event of the Queen's marriage resulting in a numerous family, he would be ready to vote a larger sum to the Prince, but not until the latter had given pledges of his intention to reside permanently in this country, and of his attachment to it. Nor did matters go better with the Prince's precedence; in the end it was left unregulated by Parliament, and had to be settled by an exercise of the Royal Prerogative. He was not even allowed a private secretary of his own choosing; Melbourne insisted on

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passing on to him his own, a man quite unknown to the Prince. A misgiving crossed the Prince's mind "that the English people were not pleased with the marriage." It was perhaps a not unnatural apprehension in the circumstances; but Stockmar explained, and explained again, and the Prince seemed satisfied. The Queen was far from satisfied, and revenged herself by omitting to invite Tories to her wedding. Only with difficulty was she prevailed upon to invite the Duke of Wellington.

The earlier part of the session of 1839 had been interesting in one respect, though the matter is forgotten now. It witnessed a real attempt on the part of the Whigs to confer on Ireland what would have been a boon of the first importance. Drummond, anxious to develop Ireland's commerce, and to increase the middle-class element in the country, had conceived great hopes from the creation of a state system of railways. Melbourne had concurred, and a strong commission of experts had been appointed, which now reported. Lord Morpeth moved in a Committee of the whole House for a loan of two and a half millions to begin operations in South Leinster and Munster; it was a real opportunity of making amends for the wrongs which England had inflicted on Ireland's commerce in former times. But the scheme fell before the inflexible opposition of Peel and the orthodox *laissez faire* economists. Melbourne was always open-minded in matters of this kind; the fact that his own attitude to economic questions was somewhat nebulous at any rate preserved him from bondage to abstract doctrines, and he was angry and indignant. Drummond, worn out by a mass of toil to which the railway business

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had largely contributed, died prematurely in 1840—a martyr, if ever there was one, to the country of his adoption.

In spite of this failure the Whigs displayed a remarkable revival of energy after their humiliating return to power. Russell provided the country districts with a police force. And two other measures were brought forward of which either by itself would have been more than sufficient to justify the Government's continued existence. It is true that, in both cases, a demand from their advanced wing was strongly backed by Radical and Liberal opinion in the country, but it is equally certain that neither would have been introduced by a Conservative government at that time.

The first of them concerned Education, a region where the problems and passions of a century ago are connected by a living thread of interest with those of to-day. A small Government grant had been made since 1833 in aid of building schools, and had been administered through the National Society on behalf of the Church of England, and the British and Foreign Schools Society on behalf of the Nonconformists. To go further was to tread on dangerous ground. In their factory legislation, the Whigs had attacked vested interests indeed, but interests which brought palpable evils in their train, and from motives obviously humanitarian. There was no such clear call for State intervention in education. The Church of England, while not claiming exclusive control over the whole of primary education, regarded herself as charged with educating at any rate the considerable majority of the children of the nation; Liberal opinion would

not admit that such a matter could be left entirely to voluntary agencies; extreme Radical opinion demanded centralised government control and the "secular solution"—demands which were absolutely rejected by the general sense of the community.

An interesting debate on the subject had taken place in the Lords in May 1835. The protagonist was Brougham, and to Brougham's efforts from first to last the cause of public education in England owes more than to those of any one man. In a very long and elaborate speech<sup>1</sup> he proposed a series of resolutions on the subject which were quite premature at the time; they were in fact hardly intended to do more than keep the question alive. To early education, to infant schools, Brougham attached particular importance. A child of three and four, he told their Lordships, "or even of two and under," was capable of receiving "that sort of instruction which forms the basis of all education." "Prudence, industry and self-control" could be inculcated at the tenderest age; "perverse and obstinate habits were formed before the age of seven, and the mind that might have been moulded like wet clay in a plastic hand became sullen and obdurate after that age." Melbourne, we may be sure, suspected this metaphor—a metaphor which reveals the fallacy implicit in the whole educational philosophy of Brougham and his school. On the present occasion, he contented himself with expressing approval of the general idea, but apprehension for the probable effects of the implied programme on the children. Whatever infant schools

<sup>1</sup>Hansard, 27. 1293 seq.

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should do—and he had seen something of them—they should not interfere too much with the children's natural activities, not confine them to the classroom, and not injure their health.

Russell was now determined that something more should be done. Melbourne was not so uninterested in the subject as he pretended to be. He had no illusions as to the education then provided for the upper classes; he deplored the narrowness of the curriculum in the public schools. When, again, a proposal was made to enquire into the statutes of the Universities he welcomed it. "Universities," he said, "never reformed themselves, everyone knows that"; Oxford and Cambridge were, he thought, far too expensive, and the private-coach system was bad. But by the end of 1839 his policy had become one of the merest expediency. He was anxious not to antagonise the Church of England at a time when the Government was shaky in the extreme. Nor could he share the expectations of the Radicals, that a measure of popular education would soon abolish crime and regenerate the race. He was accordingly against raising the question at that time, and, mistakenly for once, predicted failure; however, he had no objection "to yield his opinion and try." He stipulated only—and it was a reminder that was worth a great deal of facile enthusiasm—that if the subject were brought before Parliament at all, there must be a practicable plan ready prepared beforehand.<sup>1</sup> It was all very well for Lord John Russell to make light of the fundamental differences of conviction that the question would inflame; Melbourne knew better. When, at a Cabinet

<sup>1</sup>*Papers*, pp. 384-5.



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meeting, Howick assailed him with "Thank God there are some things which even you cannot stop, and this is one of them," he merely smiled. He perhaps reflected that a bold and comprehensive scheme would very soon meet with other and more intractable obstacles.

Few things illustrate more clearly the continuity of our national habits of thought and action than the manner in which our system of education has preserved to this day the impress which it received in its beginnings. The idea was to promote local and voluntary effort, Church of England, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic, by centralised Government aid. The grants were to be administered by a Committee of the Privy Council; and two "Normal Colleges" were to be set up, where Church and Nonconformist teachers could be trained together. The storm burst, and the last proposal had to be jettisoned. The Church had no great need of the Government's money, saw a threat to her hitherto unchallenged predominance in this sphere, and feared, quite unnecessarily, that the schools would be controlled by the Inspectors whom the Committee proposed to appoint. The Lords passed a resolution against the scheme which had been drafted by Peel himself, and, unsuccessfully, presented it as a petition to the Queen. Nor were many of the Nonconformists better pleased; there awoke, as Mr. Kitson Clarke remarks, one of the strongest emotions of which Englishmen were susceptible in those days, the fear of Rome. Melbourne, having undertaken to support the proposals, was as good as his word. A former Minister of Education is said to have observed—in allusion

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to the senior wrangler's well-known criticism of *Paradise Lost*—that the history of elementary education in England proves nothing, though it aptly illustrates man's fallen state; Melbourne's reflections, as he assisted in ushering these modest proposals into an imperfect world, were not dissimilar. It was extraordinary, he told the Lords, it was a thing which "might cause some to laugh and others to weep," that "in a matter so plain, so just and so true," no one could agree how to do what obviously had to be done. In the end a concordat with the Church was reached, and the chief parts of the scheme went through.

In respect of the other great measure of 1839, for the institution of the Penny Post, Melbourne can claim considerably more personal credit. Rowland Hill had conceived his idea, highly novel, of uncertain outcome financially, and hostile to various vested interests. It was opposed by Peel and other leading Conservatives on financial grounds; and, indeed, it did in the event materially contribute to the failures of the Whig Budgets. After some vicissitudes in Committee, the Bill passed the House of Commons. Fears were entertained for its fate in the Lords, and Melbourne, who had become a convinced supporter of the scheme, undertook to introduce it there himself. He did so in a speech which found its way to at least one of the old-fashioned "Treasuries of British Eloquence."

Hill was sent for to coach the Prime Minister, whom he found in his dressing-gown at one o'clock on a Sunday morning. He had occasion to mention the name of a Mr. Warburton. "Warburton, Warburton," said Melbourne, "he's one of your moral

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force men, isn't he?" Hill replied that "he certainly believed Mr. Warburton's hopes of improvement did rest rather on moral than on physical force"—terms that had come into use in connection with the Chartist agitation. "Well," Melbourne rejoined, "I can understand your physical force men, but as to your moral force men, I'll be damned if I know what they mean." They then got to business; Melbourne, as he became possessed of the subject, began to pace the room and move his lips as if arranging his speech to himself; a visitor was then announced. It turned out to be Lord Lichfield, the Postmaster-General, who cherished the direst forebodings as to the whole project, and prophesied that the Post Office building would literally collapse under the burden of the expected letters. Melbourne retired for a short time; loud words were heard from the next room, in the course of which Hill heard his own name mentioned; the dispute appeared gradually to die down. Melbourne re-entered. "Lichfield has been here," he said, "I can't think why a man can't talk of penny postage without going into a passion." With how many Lord Lichfields must Melbourne not have dealt in his time!

The Government continued as weak as ever, and a reshuffling of some of the chief posts was undertaken. Russell disinterestedly took the Colonial Office—now becoming too important and difficult a post to be left to amiable incompetents such as Glenelg; Baring replaced Spring Rice as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Macaulay, just back from India, was given the minor post of Secretary at War, and admitted to the Cabinet. He was not yet the

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author of his *History of England* or of his best essays, but was well known as an orator who had made a dazzling impression in the Reform Bill debates, and as a writer for the *Edinburgh Review*. If a sublime confidence in Whig principles was a desideratum, Macaulay could certainly provide it; his faith in the virtues of his party is characterised even by his biographer as "almost pathetic"; Melbourne said he wished he were "as cocksure about anything as Tom Macaulay was about everything." This appointment, though it was unprecedented of its kind and has been praised as such, was not due to the least inclination to compliment literature at the expense of business; Melbourne, as he often said, had no use for literary men in anything but literature. It was as a first-rate fighting speaker in the House of Commons that Macaulay was wanted, and he certainly did nobly under the most discouraging circumstances. In the Cabinet he was somewhat fatiguing; Hobhouse feared that, if he talked at that rate, no business would get done.

Never did a Government which, it is bare justice to say, had accomplished such great things for the country decline more hopelessly than Melbourne's Government from the beginning of 1840. The high and not ungenerous hopes which had inaugurated the era of Reform were now being extinguished in a scene of, in Carlyle's words, "endless jargoning, debating, motioning, a settlement effected between the Honourable Mr. This and the Honourable Mr. That as to their respective pretensions to ride the high horse." The matter of Irish Municipal Government had, as we have seen, been settled by compromise; but that of Ireland's

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electoral law, the registration of her voters, was taken by the Tories out of the hands of the Whigs, and, in one form or another, was bandied about incessantly between the two parties. The interminable case of *Stockdale v. Hansard*, which raised the question of parliamentary privilege as regards publications, arose about the same time and caused a vast amount of trouble. The fact that a very few votes one way or the other might make all the difference imported a frantic excitement and bitterness into debate. Those who think that parliamentary manners have deteriorated of recent times may be recommended to a passage in Macaulay's diary of this period. Going down to the House for an important debate, he found one Honourable Member whistling and making all sorts of noises, another so ill-mannered that Macaulay hoped he was drunk; men on both sides standing up, shaking their fists and bawling at the top of their voices; O'Connell "raging like a mad bull."

Nevertheless, Melbourne hung on, and at a time when his health was such that his brother attributed part of the failures of the Government to that cause. He was losing control; an admirable manager of a going concern, he was now less than ever the man to rally a defeated cause. If politics were sterile, and debates a compound of futility and heat, there was always his own particular domain, which, during the months immediately succeeding the Queen's marriage, had not grown less engrossing. "No one supposes I *want* to go on, do they?" he is reported to have remarked in his more cynical manner, "but I must think of the poor fellows who would have to put down their

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broughams"—and, in fact, he had the highest notions of party loyalty, and was extremely sensitive to any imputation of abandoning his friends. His colleagues would indeed, have had a great deal to say if he had resigned for any reason short of sheer necessity. And he would have had to reckon not only with them, but with his Sovereign—and the Queen was expecting her first baby throughout the latter part of 1840. None the less, it seemed even to his faithful friend and admirer Hatherton that he was clinging to office because he could not bear to leave the Queen, and his position with her. But, looking at the course of events as a whole, it does not appear, as we shall see, that the Whigs were imperatively called upon to give up until the beginning of the year in which they were actually driven from office; if they had listened to Melbourne's advice, they would have resigned before that event.

However, though faint, he was still pursuing, and could pull himself together when really necessary. The necessity arose during the summer of 1840. It was no matter this time of Irish Registration or of Parliamentary Publications—contentious, involved, and fought out in the acrid atmosphere of the House of Commons; but of something far more exhilarating—a great move in the high game of European diplomacy. The Eastern Question had been working up for some time into not the least acute of its nineteenth-century phases, and the strongest man in Melbourne's Government, who was also Foreign Secretary, was taking a very definite line therein. Palmerston had for years been ploughing a lonely furrow, undisturbed by any criticisms save the

shrewd comments of the Prime Minister, now his brother-in-law; his native powers had been matured by a long experience, and he was a perfect master of the European situation. But he was still far from popular in the Cabinet; his conduct of foreign affairs was exceedingly independent; nor did he appear to care very much for the opinions of his colleagues in a sphere which he had made his own.

The Ottoman Empire was afflicted with a disease which has not even yet terminated fatally, and Russia and France were watching its symptoms with the greatest interest. Russia had, some time before, obtained by treaty a species of protectorate over Turkey; to neutralise this situation by bringing her under the protection of other Powers also, and at the same time to prevent a combination between France and Russia, were Palmerston's ultimate objects. The Pasha of Egypt, Mehemet Ali, had revolted against the Sultan, invaded Syria, and seemed likely to "accelerate the dissolution" of the Ottoman Empire. France had at first seemed disposed to join Prussia, Russia, Austria and Great Britain in a combination designed to check Mehemet Ali and restore Syria to the Porte, but, at the instance of Thiers, had drawn back. More than that, Palmerston had been informed by our ambassador at Constantinople that France was working for a separate arrangement with Mehemet Ali. This would in effect have created a French sphere of influence from the Levant to the Persian Gulf, have threatened our communications with India, and have been a source of continual unrest.

On hearing the news from Constantinople,

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Palmerston acted decisively and at once. He caused to be drafted a treaty between Great Britain and the other Powers to the exclusion of France (July 15th, 1840). Under this treaty, Mehemet Ali was to be expelled from at any rate half of Syria, and "pressure" was to be brought to bear on him if he proved recalcitrant, as he did.

But trouble arose when Palmerston, "in the most easy nonchalant way imaginable, and at the end of a Cabinet meeting," mentioned this treaty to his colleagues; they ought to know about it, he said. Two at least, it at once appeared, had very grave doubts about a policy which appeared to threaten war with France for the sake of Syria, and talked of resignation. Palmerston thereupon said that if his colleagues had any doubt, he was quite prepared to resign himself; Melbourne called his Maker to witness against the need for anyone's resigning. Palmerston, absolutely imperturbable, was prepared to back his opinion; France would not fight, however much she might bluster; things might look "awkward" for the moment, but we should "pull through" all right; as for Mehemet Ali, he would soon yield to treatment. News, indeed, arrived that our fleet was blockading Beyrout and anchoring off Alexandria; this was in September; and the new French Ambassador, imperfectly acquainted with the habits of British statesmen, endeavoured to obtain an explanation. Guizot went from Department to Department, in quest of a member of the Government, and finding none; "They take things easily across the Channel," he remarked.

One member of the Cabinet who had displayed great enthusiasm for the treaty of July was Lord



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John Russell. But Lord John soon changed his mind, or lost his nerve. He listened to other advice; Palmerston was clearly wrong; he threatened to resign; his exalted brother, the Duke of Bedford, was of opinion that he must be firm on the point; Spencer (Althorp) too was with him. His resignation would have looked bad in the eyes of Europe, and indeed upset the Government. Melbourne now came in. He was nervous himself, and could not go quite so far as Palmerston, but he kept a cool head.<sup>1</sup> He resolved to hold his Cabinet together, to give Palmerston, whom he urged to caution, a free hand, and to deal with Lord John. To the latter's first threat of resignation he replied with sage counsel. The prospect of war alarmed him, he must say frankly, as much as it did Lord John; if it could be averted by a change of Government, he would agree to the change. But France was the real aggressor, and he himself believed she was bluffing; if we did not stand firm now, we should only render war more certain in the future; it was a bad thing to listen to too much advice. Lord John remained obdurate; the Queen, he said, must be prepared for his resignation. But Melbourne countered this. Her Majesty, who was in a delicate state of health, was very much agitated by the crisis, and, at her personal request, Lord John consented to withdraw his resignation. But it would be tedious to enumerate Lord John's remonstrances, explanations of his position, and threats to resign.

Things certainly looked "awkward," as Palmer-

<sup>1</sup>Greville's strictures on Melbourne in this matter (*Memoirs*, 2nd Series, I. 312) were quite unjustified; see especially Melbourne's letter to Russell in *Papers*, pp. 477 seq.

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ston had predicted they would, when the news got abroad of the Treaty of July. The French newspapers breathed fire and slaughter. The Duke of Wellington, though agreeing with Palmerston's line, shook his head, and talked of our inadequate preparedness for war. King Leopold of Belgium, who was exceedingly frightened on his own account, communicated his fears to the Queen; but Melbourne was on the spot, and reassured her. Through all this Palmerston held on, perfectly confident of the correctness of his own appreciation of the situation in France and of Mehemet Ali's capacity for resistance; he had, moreover, taken very good care that the "pressure" on the latter should be both prompt and effective. Let them wait, he said, for the news from Syria; they would not have long to wait. Thiers, meanwhile, announced his intention of summoning the Chambers for the sanction of military preparations. Melbourne now took a hand himself, and dispatched through King Leopold to Louis Philippe a letter which unfortunately has not been preserved. According to a free version of it subsequently communicated by Palmerston to a friend, its substance was as follows. "Thiers' announcement is a threat. By God! I won't stand it. If this goes on I will immediately call Parliament together, and see what they think of it."

This letter appears to have been written about October 16th.<sup>1</sup> On the 20th, Thiers resigned. Louis Philippe, it appears, had allowed him to assume a bellicose tone, and thereby paved the way for the fall of a Minister of whom he was glad to be

<sup>1</sup>Lloyd Sanders in *Papers*, p. 487, n.

rid ; he had never had any serious intention of going to war. News soon arrived of the first of the successes won by our fleet on the Syrian coast, successes which ended in the capture of Acre (November 7th, 1840) and the total collapse of Mehemet Ali. In the end, matters were adjusted with France, and in any case the "aged freebooter" was out of Syria. Palmerston had been right from the start and every time ; Melbourne had shown all his wonted tact in keeping the Cabinet together. Having brought matters to a successful issue by a combination of judgment, coolness and resolution, to which it would surely be hard to find a parallel in the annals of diplomacy, the Foreign Secretary could afford to be generous. Lord John Russell had, when he heard of Palmerston's refusal to refer outstanding matters to a Congress, again, and justifiably, threatened to resign. He was now gratified by receiving a letter in which Palmerston solemnly attributed to *him* the main credit for the affair, on the ground that it was his warm support which had induced the Cabinet to adopt the original treaty of July !

The Syrian crisis bulked large enough in 1840. But it seems less than nothing now as compared with those social and economic movements which constitute the real history of the distressed years which followed 1837, and impart an air of extraordinary futility to the dismal Parliamentary activity of that period. So at least it appears in the retrospect ; but, after all, the Whigs had to carry on the ordinary government of the country and deal with ordinary questions as they arose ; they were not the first statesmen in English history, nor the

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last, to fail in appreciating the real direction of the deeper currents of their age. The working classes had lost faith in Radicals no less than in Whigs; hatred of the Poor Law which the Government renewed, hatred of the multiplying factories on the part of those whose former means of livelihood they were destroying, were the main causes of the Chartist movement. Parallel with, but hostile to, this comparatively spontaneous revolt against existing conditions, there had grown up a movement of a different kind. This was an agitation against the Corn Laws—a middle-class movement in origin, the outcome of a new commercial radicalism designed at once to satisfy the economic demands of the manufacturers and to enable the Radical politicians to regain contact with the working classes. The one movement was fated to an ignominious collapse, owing partly to the divergent aims of its moderate and revolutionary sections, and mainly to the inherent impossibility of effecting a revolution in England. The other was destined to provide the earliest and most successful example of propaganda by modern methods, and to grow from strength to victory. In dealing with the Chartist risings of 1839 the Whigs, true to the spirit of their leader, acted firmly and temperately. Having formed a correct estimate of the possibility of revolution, they demanded no extraordinary powers, did what was necessary to preserve public order, and no more. And, a striking tribute to the success of their Irish policy, Ireland was actually able to spare troops for England.<sup>1</sup>

In deference to Radical pressure, the ballot was

<sup>1</sup>Walpole, *Russell*, I. 322.

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now allowed to be a matter on which members of the Government might vote as they pleased; Melbourne's attitude towards this vexed question had considerably impressed one of the soundest of the Radical leaders. Joseph Parkes, with whom he had kept up relations, recorded an interview with him in August 1837—an interview in which Melbourne displayed his usual diplomatic frankness. He confessed that he had himself been “converted by Mill's article,” but his Cabinet were “a mixed set”; the (Radical) “movement” was going quite fast enough, and he had to consider what might be the wider effects of allowing it to gain a victory in this particular. Parkes, from his own point of view, contrasted Melbourne most favourably with Lord John Russell. “I believe, as I long have,” wrote the Birmingham reformer, “that he is the best of the lot for our purposes; first because he has no common sagacity, and facility of *turning himself round* and measuring the force of the currents in the political ocean.”<sup>1</sup>

The far greater and more intricate question of the Corn Laws was now asserting itself. Though always strongly against leaving the agricultural interest entirely without protection, and indisposed until nearly the end of his time to modify the existing system, Melbourne had allowed this matter also to be regarded as open. Meanwhile, and from the beginning of 1839, the Anti-Corn-Law League had assumed the form of a highly organised popular campaign, and one, moreover, inspired by a quasi-religious fervour. Nonconformity, hostile to revolutionary Chartism, found obvious affinities

<sup>1</sup>See letter in Buckley, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–57.

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with a movement apparently directed to multiplying the enjoyment of the fruits of the earth, and to heralding the brotherhood of the human race in a process of beneficent co-operation. To Melbourne the whole agitation was suspect at first. He shared the usual protectionist view that a country which was becoming rapidly industrialised could not safely become dependent upon foreign sources for its food supply. The campaign seemed to be engineered by "master-manufacturers," hard-fisted men, with the cry of cheap food on their lips and the thought of cheap labour in their hearts, eager to exploit for their own ends the existing distress, and to invoke a class war. However, though the process remains obscure, he became genuinely convinced that some change must be made, and was prepared to support Russell's proposal to substitute a moderate fixed duty of 8s. for the "sliding-scale"; to total repeal he always remained strongly adverse.

At the beginning of 1841, their last year of office, the exhausted Whigs prepared to face Parliament in a state of some uncertainty. Finance had always been their weak point; the finance of Melbourne's Government was, in Gladstone's words, "intolerably bad," and the fiscal system of the country stood sorely in need of the thorough overhauling it was soon to get from Peel. Among the expedients which the Whigs decided to adopt, but so late in the day that it savoured of an election cry, was that of Russell for lowering the duty on imported corn. It was a vital and a most complex question. Economists were divided in opinion about the probable effect on prices of substituting a fixed for

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a movable duty on foreign corn. The Cabinet debated. Melbourne, though he had been seriously applying his mind to the question, was hardly qualified to play a leading part in the discussions, and listened wearily. But, just as the decisive meeting was breaking up, he interjected a practical question—"Bye the bye, there's one thing we haven't agreed on, which is, what are we to say? Is it to make corn dearer, or cheaper, or to make the price steady? I don't care which, but we must all be in the same story."

It was of no avail. Melbourne, when taunted in the House of Lords with having changed his mind on the Corn Laws, said quite frankly that people frequently changed their minds, and that he had changed *his* mind; the whole question was simply one of expediency. Peel riddled the Whigs' financial proposals, and they were defeated on one of the items of their Budget. They were now faced with a plain alternative—should they resign, or should they appeal to the country? Melbourne earnestly begged them to resign, and not dissolve. He disliked, he said, an appeal to the people when their passions were roused on any subject, but more especially when the subject was food. "No terms could express his horror, his detestation, his absolute loathing of the attempt to enlist religious feeling against the Corn Laws. He thought these laws ought to be altered. But deliberately, and not under excitement."

Nothing was ever said more in character. The whole episode indeed provides an admirable illustration of the true Whig spirit, its compromising tendency, its suspicion of popular agitations, but

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its readiness to defer to anything like a real popular demand. Melbourne's advice, in fact, was perfectly sound, but he was overruled. The Cabinet decided to dissolve, and, before doing so, determined to bring forward the question of the Corn Laws. Peel, equally determined not to show his own hand as regards that crucial question, retorted by proposing a direct vote of want of confidence. One could have wished that the great Whig Government of 1830-41 had made a more dignified exit. The Government Whips surpassed themselves. They whipped up every man, the maimed, the halt and the blind; they actually, and amid cries of "Shame" from their opponents, wheeled into their lobby one member who was "in a state of imbecility." After a debate lasting five nights, the Government was defeated by one vote. The country subsequently declared itself most decidedly against them; they were utterly defeated on the Address (August 28th, 1841), and, at long last, they resigned.

It was a dark time when Peel, to the relief of Melbourne, formed his Government. The Whigs had certainly not been helped by fortune during these last years. Harvests had been bad, trade had been bad. The Afghan expedition, which had been undertaken under the best military advice, was soon to end disastrously; the China war on the other hand, which seems to have been a shady business, was soon to end successfully. In Ireland O'Connell, weary of the Whigs and hating Peel, was before long to embark on the most wonderful of all his oratorical campaigns, to find himself, towards the end, outbidden by the prophets of



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"Young Ireland," to rally his powers and face them manfully, and to die at last, utterly worn out, on a pilgrimage to Rome. Worst of all was the distress of the working classes, especially in the North.

Their condition, indeed, was to touch its nadir in 1842. There had been bad times before, as all could remember. But a factor in the national life, with which later generations have acquired a horrible familiarity, was now recognised with something of the sharpness of a first impression—the problem of unemployment as a definite and recurrent feature of industry. At the beginning of that year, the Speech from the Throne called attention to the widespread distress, and Melbourne, in the course of one of the last speeches he ever made in Parliament, delivered his sentiments thereupon. He had not, any more than others, a direct remedy to propose which the State could administer. Whatever could be done by human means ought to be done with the greatest care and the utmost promptitude. Some part of the distress might be attributable to the Corn Laws, which certainly ought to be amended. But he was sure that legislation, as such, would be powerless to remedy a condition which seemed inherent in the very nature of an industrial civilisation. To encourage the sufferers in entertaining exaggerated hopes from a change in the laws, a change in the Government, or a change in the Constitution, would be to invite disappointment, and therewith danger. What had been the previous experience? Catholic emancipation had failed to produce tranquillity in Ireland. The Reform Bill appeared not to have improved

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the condition of the people at large. "But this I do know," he concluded, "that, if there is disappointment, it does not arise from the vicious principle or the ill working of those measures themselves, but from the wild, unfounded, exaggerated expectations of their effects which were indulged in and anticipated. A man does not know himself, nor is he a safe judge of his own conduct. But I believe myself never to have contributed to the raising of these wild and illusory hopes. What I have not done before I will not do now, because I feel certain that the measures from which great, extended and permanent benefit is intended will be very likely to terminate in failure, and consequently in general discontent."

## CHAPTER XI

### *CLOSING SCENES*

THE Queen had been married in February 1840. But her marriage had, for the time being, diminished neither her own reliance upon Melbourne nor the complexities of the situation at Buckingham Palace. Prince Albert provided a problem at once personal and constitutional. Homesick for his beloved Duchy; conscious of being a mere appendage to his exalted wife; surrounded by those who regarded him with alien eyes; ill at ease amid splendours to which he found it difficult to accommodate himself, his prospects did not seem auspicious. In particular, he seemed likely to have nothing to do except hang about, and, when the Court was at Windsor, get some shooting. But everything in fact was working in his favour; Stockmar, with his quiet and inflexible determination that his pupil should one day be a power indeed; Melbourne, with his detached perception of what was bound to come. The one thing needful, the position which the Baron had helped the Prince to win, was now won; it remained to exploit, surely if very slowly, its immense possibilities. Up to the time of his marriage the Prince had seemed to have no taste for politics. But Stockmar persevered, and it came to pass; the seed of a not ignoble ambition, when once it had found a lodgment in the Prince's breast, grew all the more rapidly for the enforced suppression of his

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other interests. For the moment, indeed, not much could be done; Albert was utterly unacquainted with things English, and, as regards the Queen, Melbourne and the Baroness Lehzen were paramount in their respective spheres. But circumstances would soon remove the one; and gentle pressure could, and within a couple of years did, relegate the other to her native Hanover.

Melbourne, meanwhile, was observing the young couple shrewdly and kindly. He divined the Prince's feelings—his wish to be of use, his discontent with his position, and, though this could not be remedied, his desire for a more exalted title. Whether or not he really warmed towards the young man, he certainly determined to do his best for him. It was no doubt regrettable that the Prince's appearance, manner and accent were unmistakably Teutonic, and that, when he appeared in society, he took refuge behind an icy barrier of formality. It was also a pity that he demanded from those selected for his personal suite so high a standard of propriety<sup>1</sup> that one at least of the possible candidates is said to have "thanked Heaven his character was too bad for the job." Melbourne was himself as jealous as anyone for the reputation of the Court; but there were limits, and he himself had always encouraged in his Sovereign a merciful attitude towards human infirmity which at one time she seems to have shown some disposition to adopt. "It is always right to show that one does not like what is obviously wrong," she had written to her betrothed shortly before her marriage, "but it is very dangerous to be *too* severe." The Prince was not

<sup>1</sup>*Girlhood*, II. 287; *Letters*, I. 204.

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going the right way to commend himself to those with whom it was desirable that he should be popular; "This damned morality will ruin everything," the Prime Minister is said to have remarked in a fit of irritation, and a momentary relapse towards an earlier point of view. However, all this went for very little as compared with the one thing that really mattered—would her husband acquire over the Queen that restraining influence of which she stood so badly in need? On this vital point Melbourne was soon satisfied. The Prince was obviously neither foolish nor vicious; he seemed also to be aware that his path craved wary walking; any man of sense might feel devoutly thankful he was there. Melbourne conceived, in fact, a very high opinion of him, and spoke of him to the Queen in terms which, as she justly observed, he would not have used if he had not meant what he said. And, as he was rejoiced to see, the Queen, in spite of some early quarrels, continued to be in love with her husband. She was particularly proud of his "utter indifference to the attractions of all ladies"; when her sagacious Prime Minister, from the depths of his experience, warned her that these were "early days to boast," she was excusably indignant.

Melbourne must have been well aware of the strength of the influence which Stockmar was exercising over the awakening Prince. He no doubt knew also, without caring in the least, that the Prince was also imbibing from that source some grave and, it must be acknowledged, not altogether groundless doubts as to his own capacity to cope with public affairs any longer. That Albert would acquire "unbounded influence" he foresaw; he was

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probably prepared for his eventually becoming, as he did become, the real King of England. But could he have foretold the qualities of mind and will, the untiring industry, which the Prince was in due time to develop—the great knowledge of foreign affairs, the calm determination, which were to confound Palmerston himself, the organising capacity which was to conceive and create the Exhibition of 1851, the wide interests which were to leave their mark on the social and industrial history of his age, the contempt, deep if suppressed, for English parliamentary institutions and English statesmanship, the autocratic tendencies which might, had they not been cut short by an early death, have provoked a constitutional crisis of the first magnitude?

However, these things belonged to the future, whereas the Prince's training was a present and a pressing matter. The Queen showed at first not the least intention of sharing her Throne and her Prime Minister with anybody; none the less, Melbourne was able to arrange before long for the Prince to have full access to foreign despatches. He proved an apt and earnest student, and was soon anxious to give the Prime Minister the benefit of his advice, even at considerable length. "I always," we find him writing, "commit my views to paper, and then communicate them to Lord Melbourne. He seldom answers me, but I have the satisfaction of seeing him act entirely in accordance with what I have said." For all that, the Prince continued to be unhappy. He was bored—bored by the endless games of chess to which he was condemned, bored by the evenings and by the people. Melbourne sympa-

thised with him, and discussed the matter with the Prince's private secretary. The Prince longed, it appeared, to vary the monotony of the society by bringing literary and scientific people to Court, but the Queen was the obstacle. She had "no fancy to encourage such people; she would not like conversation to be going on in which she could not take her fair share," and was too honest to pretend to know more than she did. Her education, Melbourne thought, had been to blame; it had been too much confined to languages and "accomplishments"; anything more she had owed to her own "natural shrewdness and quickness." He did not see what could be done about it; King Leopold's programme was evidently not being fulfilled.

However, the Prince's position quickly became stronger. An Heir to the Throne was expected; the Tories, after a good deal of negotiation, consented to the nomination of the Prince as Regent, should one unfortunately be required. And when a change of Government was approaching, he offered Melbourne his services in preventing a recurrence of what had happened as regards the Queen's Household in 1839. It was a difficult business; when we read of the anxiety of Peel not to appear to put undue pressure upon the Queen, of the Queen's reluctance to concede the principle of the thing, of the unwillingness of everyone concerned to commit themselves in so delicate a matter, one wonders that it ever was settled. However, it was settled, and the Prince acquired great credit. Melbourne's departure was now imminent, a prospect which the Prince was prepared to face with equanimity, and even satisfaction.

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Melbourne had done his best to make the approach easy for the greater statesman who was to succeed him. He had for a long time been endeavouring to induce the Queen to hold out an olive branch to the Tories. They had not, he said, thrown out so many of his measures after all, and as for the alterations they had made in them, he "didn't know but what they had not done them good." He now set himself to convey some personal and much-needed advice to Peel. Meeting Greville at a dinner where some Tories were present; "Have you any means of speaking to these chaps?" he asked. Greville said he could say anything to them. "Well," said Melbourne, "I think there are one or two things which Peel ought to be told, and I wish you would tell him. Don't let him suffer any appointment he is going to make to be talked about, and don't let her hear it through anyone but himself, and, whenever he does anything, or has anything to propose, let him explain to her clearly his reason. The Queen is not conceited; she is aware there are many things she cannot understand, and she likes to have them explained to her elementarily, not at length and in detail, but shortly and clearly; neither does she like long audiences, and I never stayed with her a long time. These things he should attend to, and they will make matters go on more smoothly."

On the other hand, if Peel had to be prepared for the Queen, the Queen had also to be prepared for Peel; Melbourne had never held that constitutional theory or practice required from the Sovereign an abdication of independent judgment. The Queen should, he advised her, never allow herself to be



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driven into a corner, and forced to decide before her mind was fully made up.

The hour of parting arrived; the Queen "was dreadfully affected for some time afterwards." To her uncle Leopold, who bore up remarkably well when he heard that Melbourne was gone, and omitted to sympathise with her, she wrote reminding him "that *eleven days* was the *longest* that I ever was without seeing him, and this time will be elapsed on Saturday, so you may imagine what the change must be." None the less, the Queen received Peel politely, and behaved admirably when the other Ministers came to kiss hands. But she never, as she told Peel, intended to break off correspondence with such a dear friend as Lord Melbourne. Peel, anxious to please her in every way, quite agreed; Greville also, and no doubt many others, thought it would be a good thing if she kept up with her late Prime Minister.

The situation was obviously a delicate one, and Melbourne, used as he was to delicate situations, hesitated. He foresaw inevitable complications; how could she keep personal and public matters apart? On the other hand, she was anxious, surrounded by strange faces, expecting another baby very soon; it was his plain duty to do all he could to tide her over the crisis of the change—and he himself could hardly bear to lose touch with her altogether; however, if she wrote, it must be through Anson, formerly his own and now the Prince's private secretary. But the Queen had, of course, no intention of writing through Anson or anybody else, and the natural consequence followed. She had conceived a poor opinion of Peel

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as a judge of character; and remembering as she did the Bed-chamber affair, it must be admitted that she had some reason. Melbourne and she were soon engaged in correspondence, and she evidently wrote for his advice, especially about appointments, diplomatic and other. Melbourne replied, for example, that he certainly thought the Conservatives weak in material for ambassadors and colonial governors; while Lord Heytesbury was a very able man, he felt very doubtful about Lord ——. However, the Queen must not attempt to interfere with the names submitted to her, except “in any manifestly and glaringly bad case”; but it might be as well if she spoke to Sir Robert Peel on the general question. She must, above all, place absolute confidence in her new Prime Minister, who deserved it, and remember that he himself was not infallible.

Not content with writing, the Queen naturally invited Melbourne to Windsor before long. He felt doubtful, consulted Stockmar, and made no direct reply. In fact, as the Queen complained, “he very often gave no answers to questions that were put,” and no wonder. However, Peel was no doubt rather surprised at the decided opinions to which she now and then gave utterance as to various gentlemen with whom she could hardly have had the opportunity of forming a close acquaintance, and things had gone quite far enough already in the eyes of an inhumanly vigilant observer. It is true that we have not the Queen’s letters to Melbourne, nor have we all of his replies. But that he should have attempted to influence her in the slightest degree against Peel on any matter of policy is quite incredible; in any case, how could Stockmar have

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known what was in the letters? But he suspected unutterable things. He accordingly despatched Anson to see Melbourne, having primed him with a written memorandum, and supplementary verbal instructions. Unfortunately we have only Anson's account of what took place, and that as reported by Stockmar, whose English style, though calculated to make his meaning clear to the most obtuse comprehension, was less well adapted to recording the *nuances* of an interview on a delicate matter with an unusual man.

Lord Melbourne, Anson was commissioned to say, must himself see that this correspondence could not go on; had he not definitely identified himself with the Opposition by a recent speech? Melbourne had a considerable fund of patience, natural and acquired, but this was too much. "God eternally damn it," he broke out; "flesh and blood cannot stand this. I only spoke upon the defensive, which Ripon's speech at the beginning of the session rendered quite necessary. I cannot be expected to give up my position in the country, neither do I think it to the Queen's interest that I should." But the storm was over as soon as begun, and Anson then asked him "if he saw no danger likely to arise from this correspondence?" After a long pause, Melbourne replied with his usual candour, "I certainly cannot think it right"; but added that he thought there was a precedent for something of the kind; at any rate, he should distinctly advise the Queen to adhere to her Ministers in everything, "unless she saw that the time had arrived at which it might be resisted." "Yes," annotated the Baron, "that means he will wait until

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circumstances enable him to plunge, in all security, the dagger in Peel's back." Comment on this is needless; it seems pretty evident what really happened. Melbourne admitted the correspondence was irregular, but thought that, the Queen being set on it, it had better go on for the present. He was then provoked into saying something ironical or paradoxical after his manner; and down it went in Stockmar's memorandum.<sup>1</sup>

After two or three weeks the unwearied Baron returned to the attack; his gloomy forebodings of the worst, his earnest appeals to the spirit of the British Constitution and to Melbourne's better self impressed the latter; Stockmar was personally disinterested, and Melbourne bore him no malice. If Lord Melbourne wanted the Baron's advice, which the latter was always most reluctant to give, he should wait until after the Queen's confinement, then nearly due, and let the correspondence die a natural death. Melbourne quite agreed, and told the Queen so, who appears to have remonstrated.<sup>2</sup> Stockmar waited until exactly two weeks after the Queen had been safely delivered of the future King Edward VII. Had Lord Melbourne ceased writing? It appeared not; warmed, perhaps, by the recent happy event, he had even promised again to write to her from time to time. For the third time the Baron descended, omniscient, inflexible. Mrs. Norton was talking, Peel was restive; he was sure that Lord Melbourne would realise the situation. Melbourne made no reply, but the correspondence thenceforth became less political than ever, as no

<sup>1</sup>See *Letters*, I. 339 seq.

<sup>2</sup>*Letters*, I. 359, top.

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doubt it would have done in any case, when once Peel was firmly established.

With Melbourne there went the most powerful of the influences that had played on the Queen's pre-nuptial self; Stockmar saw his own pupil advancing gradually, irresistibly towards the goal. And there was now an Heir to the Throne, a helpless infant, quite unprotected against the application of a system which was to commend itself to his rather exceptional father, and was designed to make him as unlike as possible to the nearer ancestors and relations of his mother. "Be not over solicitous about education," Melbourne wrote to the Queen. "It may be able to do much, but it does not do so much as is expected from it. It may mould and direct the character, but it rarely alters it." Stockmar and Prince Albert thought otherwise; to what purpose we know.

Melbourne had now lost the presence of her for whose sake mainly he had remained in office so long, and had thereby done some not altogether merited injury to his reputation as a statesman. Seeing that he had, save for one brief interval, held high office for nearly eleven years on end, that he had no family, and that his second, or perhaps his first, home had for some time been Windsor Castle, people naturally wondered what he would do with himself. One man thought that he would now take the opportunity of reading Chrysostom through in the original Greek, but he had not come to that yet. Hatherton met him on his way to the House of Lords a day or so after his resignation, noted with amusement how, when they were approaching the Carlton Club, he carefully moderated his



REFLECTION

“Farewell, a long farewell, to all my greatness.”—King Henry VIII

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pace into a saunter for the edification of members at the windows, and parted from Melbourne with the remark, "Remember that you have met in the street to-day one grateful man." Melbourne's first emotion seems to have been one of relief. He reappeared in his old haunts, sprawling on the sofa, talking at Brooks' in the most genial fashion, and talking more than ever to himself. "I'll be damned if I'll do it for you, my Lord," he was heard to say one day, *à propos* of nothing, and to the amusement of members. He kept up an innocuous correspondence with the Queen; now telling her that, as he was driving through the Park, he had caught a glimpse into her uncurtained sitting-room by candle-light; now discussing the historians of the eighteenth century; now comparing Goethe with Schiller—letters of which even the third person cannot hide the leisurely charm. Otherwise he returned to a moderately energetic leadership of the Opposition in the House of Lords. He supported, we are glad to find, a demand for an enquiry into the conditions under which women and children worked in mines; the last vote he ever gave, when near his end, was in favour of the abolition of Jewish disabilities. The absorbing interest of his life was gone. None the less, with health that was still pretty fair, with troops of attached friends such as Hatherton, and with a good library, he should have found existence a very tolerable affair indeed, and have subsided into a mellow old age with the utmost grace. But it was not to be. What with business all day, and reading far into the night, he had discounted life during these latter years, and, as sometimes happens, the snap came when the strain



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had been relaxed. In little more than a year from his retirement he had a slight paralytic stroke (October 1842).

For some time afterwards there seemed to be no great change in him. But by and bye—and from 1844 at any rate—it was clear that he was done for. He continued to go about much as before, “dragging one foot after the other and with no speculation in his eye”; showing gleams of his former self through silences that grew longer and more melancholy. His friends were in a dilemma; they were afraid on the one hand of seeming to neglect him, and on the other of engaging him in conversation to which he might be unequal. Uneasily conscious of his state, he yet could not abandon all hope of one day returning to office, and to the Queen. On one occasion, when O’Connell’s trial was in agitation, he surprised and pained the guests assembled round Palmerston’s table. While he did not think the Government would go out, he had, he said, been kept awake half the night thinking what advice he would give the Queen if he were sent for. But he had perforce to recognise the hopelessness of any such idea, and when Lord John Russell had to tell him, in 1846, that his health would forbid his taking office, he agreed. “You have judged very rightly and kindly in making me no offer,” he replied. And so his existence dragged itself wearily along.

But once before the end, in an expiring flash and on a decisive occasion, he showed the character that had made him a statesman. It was in May 1846, on the eve of an event which was to deal the final blow to the old order under which he had passed

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his life. Peel had declared for the total repeal of the Corn Laws; Bentinck and Disraeli were out for his blood; the Conservative Government was only kept in power by the support of the Whigs; the Protectionists thought for the moment that they had won. The Whig Peers, "men of metal and large-acred squires," were, at Lord John Russell's behest, summoned to a meeting at Lansdowne House; among them shuffled in the man who had once been Melbourne. Lord John spoke; the situation, he said, was such that it would be inconsistent with his personal or political honour to be a party to altering or mutilating the measure which Peel had proposed. Other speakers followed; it was evident that the Whig leader's attitude did not commend itself. Melbourne then rose. "My Lords," he said, "it's a damned thing that Peel should have proposed the repeal of the duty on foreign corn. But he has done it, and the consequences are that you'll all have to vote for it." It was unanswerable, Gladstone tells us; there was nothing else to be done, and they did it.<sup>1</sup>

The shadows were now gathering more deeply around Melbourne. He complained, unjustly it would appear, that he was neglected. Lord and Lady Palmerston spent as much time with him as possible; his brother, Lord Beauvale, had married late in life a young and charming Viennese lady, who showed him the greatest kindness and attention; and Mrs. Norton wrote to him and visited him when she could. But he was necessarily much alone, listlessly turning over the pages of books

<sup>1</sup>Greville, 2nd Ser., 2. 394, as corrected by Gladstone, *Nineteenth Century*, Vol. XXVII, N.S. p. 43.

which he had almost lost the power of reading, or musing over the fire.

As a statesman, he had done his best to serve a world in which he had never much believed. Nor had he any reason to be ashamed of the manner in which he had acquitted himself of the great trust reposed in him. He would, indeed, have been the last man to overrate his own achievements, or to flatter himself that he had left any decisive mark on the history of his age. It must also have been increasingly borne in upon his later years that the circumstances which had permitted him to attain the highest office in the State belonged to a vanishing order, and that the political creed for which he had stood would not be likely to survive the succeeding generation. Yet he may have dwelt with some moderate satisfaction on the fact that he had, by virtue of his genial presence, his sound sense, and his healing moderation, kept his party together during a long and important period, and thus facilitated the collective action of more energetic and more determined men. We know that he prided himself at any rate on the part he had played in preserving public order during 1830-32. But when he considered the immense change, a change from era to era, which had overtaken the England of his earlier manhood; when he contemplated the feverish activity, the confused hopes, the painful dislocations which it had brought in its train, he may have doubted again: alike by intelligence and by temperament, he was denied the consolations of the optimistic, or the unreflective. However, if national issues were infinitely hard to discern, and political contrivances infinitely precarious, men

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and women were realities; and fate had assigned him a unique path of personal service to the Queen of England herself. That even this would appear, one day, as the crowning irony of a life which had been fruitful in ironies, he may have dimly foreseen.

It was among a few personal memories that his last days appear to have been passed—memories of his mother, at whose portrait he would sit gazing for hours, of his wife, whom he always mentioned with affection, and of the Queen, whose name he could never hear spoken without showing emotion. He could not complain that she had forgotten him, although she had transferred her affections to his successor, and circumstances almost necessarily prevented anything like a renewal of their old intercourse. She wrote to him from time to time, never forgot his birthday, and once, when he imagined himself to be embarrassed, placed at his disposal a large sum of money which was repaid after his death. Meanwhile, he lingered on at Brocket Hall, looking forward, no doubt, to her occasional letters as the one great thing still left him, and repeating to himself, as he was heard to do, the lines from *Samson Agonistes*:

“So much I feel my genial spirits droop,  
My hopes all flat; nature within me seems  
In all her functions weary of herself,  
My race of glory run, and race of shame,  
And I shall shortly be with them that rest.”

And indeed, though now withdrawn from the world, he had played too high and large a part in the affairs of his country for them to allow him to rest on this side of the grave. An incident from the

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stormy period of the Reform Bill was suddenly revived in the autumn of 1848. The letter which, at the very crisis, Young wrote to Colonel Napier, without Melbourne's knowledge but under his frank, now came out and found its way to the newspapers. No importance was attached to it by anybody, though it caused considerable amusement. But it was a staggering blow to the old and enfeebled statesman, who never recovered from the shock.<sup>1</sup>

Melbourne died on November 24th, 1848, and was buried in Hatfield Church. His title became extinct on the death of his brother in 1853. His estates then passed to his sister, Lady Palmerston, and ultimately to the late Earl Cowper, who, dying in 1905, was also the last of his line.

Palmerston, in stately language which would not have displeased its subject, had warned the Queen that the end was imminent. "Viscount Palmerston," he wrote, "is here engaged on the melancholy occupation of watching the gradual extinction of the lamp of life of one who was not more distinguished by his brilliant talents, his warm affections, and his first-rate understanding than by those sentiments of attachment to your Majesty which rendered him the most devoted subject who ever had the honour to serve a Sovereign." "Though not a *firm* Minister," wrote Queen Victoria, "he was a noble, kind-hearted, generous being."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Greville, Dec. 9th, 1848 (unpublished).

<sup>2</sup>*Letters*, II. 203-4.

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Torrens' biography is a valuable work, especially as the writer, in early life an Assistant Commissioner on the Poor Law Enquiry in Ireland, and later a liberal M.P., was himself in touch with statesmen and officials during Melbourne's later period. It naturally suffers from the fact that Torrens does not seem to have been entrusted with any papers by the family; nor, though he may have had some personal acquaintance with Melbourne, does he appear to have known him at all well. He accordingly rather fails in depicting the non-political side of his subject. It looks also as if he had been induced to expand into two volumes material for one only, for his digressions are numerous and irritating. He gives few references or authorities, but appears to have derived a certain amount from conversations with Lord Lansdowne. On Irish matters he writes with fullness and authority.

As regards MSS. I have used (1) the Hatherton Papers at Teddesley. So far as concerns Melbourne, these comprise (a) fairly frequent references to him in the first Lord Hatherton's diary from 1835 onwards, with few new facts but with interesting anecdotes and judgments from a contemporary who knew him well; (b) Melbourne's letters to Hatherton, over 100 in number, relating almost exclusively to Irish affairs; (2) some unpublished letters of Melbourne's to Wellesley among the Wellesley Papers in the British Museum, relating again mainly to Irish affairs; also a few odd letters preserved in the Museum. I have also verified a few points from the original MS. of the *Greville Memoirs*, and from the Home Office papers in the Record Office.

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